



# **ASSESSMENT AND DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING READING PERFORMANCE OF UNDER-PERFORMING CHILDREN IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS ON NICARAGUA'S ATLANTIC COAST**

**SECOND DRAFT REPORT**

**February 2012**

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This report was made possible with support from the American people, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Veronica Delgado, David Evans, Barbara Hunt and Tulio Tablada and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the USAID or the United States Government.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This evaluation was undertaken in February 2011 by a team of four people: Veronica Delgado Aburto, teacher and Educational Researcher; David P. Evans, Team Leader and Senior Education Analyst; Barbara C. Hunt, Reading Education Specialist and Senior Education Analyst; and Tulio Tablada, former Deputy Minister of Education and Senior Program Analyst.

Over the course of the evaluation, the team met and worked with many people who provided enthusiastic support to our efforts and we wish to thank them all, even if we cannot name them here. We wish to give special thanks, however, to the following people:

Alicia Dinerstein, Chief, Office of Health and Education (OHE), USAID/Nicaragua

Alicia Slate, Education Specialist, OHE, USAID/Nicaragua

Ray Hooker Taylor, President, Fundacion para La Autonomía y Desarrollo de la Costa Atlantica de Nicaragua (FADCANIC)

Hazel Wilson, FADCANIC

Lisa Powell, FADCANIC

Jessica Rocha, Secretary of Education, RAAN

Nubia Ordoñez, Secretary of Education, RAAS

The Education Delegates in the RAAN and RAAS

All of the project partners who graciously provided us with their time and assistance.

The principals, teachers and parents who so kindly permitted us to interview them as they were preparing to start the school year, or, in some cases, when they had just started.

Any errors in the report are, of course, the sole responsibility of the evaluation team.

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## ACRONYMS

AECID	Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation)
AED	Academy for Educational Development
AGE	Alianza Global de Educación (Global Alliance for Education)
AIR	American Institutes for Research
AMCHAM	American Chamber of Commerce/Nicaragua
AOTR	Agreement Officer's Technical Representative
APA	Aprendo, Practico, Aplico (Learn, Practice, Apply)
BICU	Bluefields Indian & Caribbean University
CDN	Convención de los Derechos del Niño (Convention for Rights of the Child)
CERCA	Civic Engagement for Education Reform in Central America
CETT	Centers for Excellence in Teacher Training
CIASES	Centro de Información y Educativa Social (Center for Social and Educational Information)
DIT	Desarrollo Infantil Temprano (Early Infant Development)
EFA	Education for All
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EIB	Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (Intercultural Bilingual Education)
ELI	Evaluación de Lectura Inicial (Early Reading Evaluation - Spanish name for EGRA)
FADCANIC	Fundación para la Autonomía y Desarrollo de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua (Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua)
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
LAC	Latin American and Caribbean
LGE	Ley General de Educación (General Law of Education)
MINED	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OEI	Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos (Organization of Iberoamerican States)
ONG	Organismo no Gubernamentale (NGO in Spanish)
PASEN II	Programa de Apoyo al Sector Educativo Nicaragüense II (Second Project of Aid to the Nicaraguan Education Sector)
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
Pcpm	Palabras Correctas por Minuto (Correct Words per Minute)

RAAN	Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte (North Atlantic Autonomous Region)
RAAS	Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur (South Atlantic Autonomous Region)
RTI	Research Triangle Institute
SEAR	Sistema Educativo Autónomo Regional (Regional Autonomous Education System)
UE	Unión Europea (European Union)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
URACCAN	Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe de Nicaragua (University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

## Nicaragua Education Statistics “At a Glance”

**Table 1: Selected National Data (2009 – 2010)**

		MINED <sup>1</sup>	Year	WB EdStats <sup>2</sup>	Year
Gross Enrollment Rate (%)	Primary	104.7	2009	117.6	2010
	Secondary	65.8	2009	69.4	2010
Net Enrollment Rate (%)	Primary	85.8	2009	92.5	2010
	Secondary	46.9	2009	45.8	2010
Dropout Rate (%)	Primary	9.5	2009		
	Secondary	13.8	2009		
Repetition Rate (%)	Primary	9.5	2009	7.9	2010
	Secondary	8.2	2009	5.7	2010
Out of School Children (#)	Primary			48,167	2010
	Secondary			68,614	2010
Trained Teachers (%)	Primary			74.9	2010
	Lower Secondary			51.8	2010
Gender Parity Index for Net Enrollment, Primary (Ratio of females to males in net enrollment)				1.01	2010
Pupil Teacher Ratio, Primary (Number of students per one teacher)				30.2	2010
<sup>1</sup> Ministerio de Educación de Nicaragua. (2011). <i>Plan Estratégico de Educación 2011-2015</i> . <sup>2</sup> World Bank EdStats Data Query. (2012). Retrieved from World Bank website <a href="http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx">http://databank.worldbank.org/data/home.aspx</a> (accessed March 28, 2012)					

**Table 2: Select Comparisons of RAAN, RAAS, and National-level Data (2009)**

	RAAN	RAAS	National
Dropout Rate, Primary (%) <sup>1</sup>	14.8	17.0	9.5
Dropout Rate, Secondary (%) <sup>1</sup>	15.0	19.5	13.8
Late Starters in Primary (%) <sup>2</sup> (Students whose age is at least one year past the age for that grade)	79.7	72.7	55.8
Out-of-School Population Age 7-14 (%) <sup>2</sup>	36.2	36.8	20.5
Children with Zero Years of Schooling within Out-of-School Population Age 7-14 (%) <sup>2</sup>	79.1	79.1	70.8
Students that Passed the 2006 Spanish Proficiency Test (3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade) <sup>3</sup>	4.3	5.8	8.6
Teachers in Primary Education without Formal Training (%) <sup>2</sup>	58.1	46.7	26.4
<sup>1</sup> Ministerio de Educación de Nicaragua. (2011). <i>Plan Estratégico de Educación 2011-2015</i> . <sup>2</sup> Flórez, C. A. (2011). <i>Situación y Perspectivas en Nicaragua para Universalizar una Educación Primaria de Calidad</i> . <sup>3</sup> Castro, V., Laguna, J. R. & Vijil, J. (2010). <i>Informe de Resultados: ELI 2009 Caribe</i> .			

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Purpose:**

The primary purpose of the assessment team is to investigate the feasibility of developing a new basic education program for under-performing children in reading in primary schools on the Atlantic Coast and to propose recommendations for its design; its secondary purpose is to collect information about the target population, under-performing children in primary school, and the organizations that serve them.

### **Findings:**

A variety of studies undertaken by international (UNESCO) and domestic organizations (e.g. MINED and CIASES, which administered EGRA in several parts of Nicaragua) have shown that Nicaraguan children do not score well on reading achievements tests and that the autonomous regions of the Caribbean Coast are among the lowest scoring group of regions and/or departments in the country and well below standards at grade level.

A number of factors may contribute to children's difficulty in learning to read on the Caribbean Coast, including:

1. Socioeconomic factors:

- poor nutrition
- health problems
- special needs, such as learning disabilities, difficulties with speech and language
- lack of availability of printed materials
- absence of a culture of reading
- absence of parents
- child labor in agriculture

2. School factors:

- lack of preschool experience
- poor match between child's culture and language and that of school
- many untrained teachers
- lack of training on strategies for teaching reading
- lack of varied instructional strategies
- lack of culture of assessment
- poor classroom management and use of time
- lack of materials
- lack of positive child-friendly atmosphere
- lack of availability of schools and teachers



- absence of technology
- absence of extra help or after-school enrichment programs

Many students on the Atlantic Coast are having trouble learning to read, with only 12.5% of first graders in the RAAN and the RAAS scoring at or above international standards for Spanish on the EGRA, as compared with 25% in other parts of the country.

A number of these students cannot read at all and they are much more likely to suffer from the socioeconomic difficulties noted above, such as poverty, unidentified special needs, and an absence of print in the home environment. Teachers and principals expressed concerns about these students and teachers reported staying after school to try and help them. But there is a high incidence of untrained teachers who lack knowledge of effective strategies for teaching reading and how to address complex learning problems, and the schools have an almost complete dearth of materials. The law specifies that children should be taught to read in their home language, but in many instances teachers lack the training and the materials to provide such instruction, so many children are also struggling to learn to read in a language they do not speak.

There are few programs that focus on reading in Nicaragua. Some projects were identified in Nicaragua that provide after-school programs for students, such as those run by the Padre Fabretto Foundation and AMCHAM; however these do not function on the Atlantic Coast. Two projects were found that provide assistance on the Atlantic Coast: 1) RTI, working through Project Zamora Terán, provides after-school reinforcement activities in reading in the RAAS in connection with the “One laptop per child” program and 2) FADCANIC’s Education for Success Project has an activity in which mentoring is done by older youth, and its Pearl Lagoon Academy for Excellence offers a variety of enrichment activities in out of school hours.

### **Recommendations:**

There are a number of options open to USAID to improve reading in grades one to three in the Caribbean Coast Region. The assessment team recommends a program with five components that the team believes are essential for the success of a reading program. The elements are prioritized by the importance of the investment, with the most important first.

- Teacher training to include the following elements:
  1. Training teachers in the five fundamental components of reading;
  2. Training teachers to use varying strategies for teaching reading to students from different language/cultural groups, with different learning styles and at different levels, within the regular classroom setting;
  3. Training reading specialist/resource persons who will run and organize the after-school or pull-out reading programs, and serve as a resource to the school and community;
  4. Training teachers to use assessment tools to determine reading levels and track student progress; and
  5. Training teachers to utilize a materials and pedagogical hints toolbox.
- Materials
  1. A “toolbox” of materials and pedagogical hints for teachers
  2. Mini Reading Corners for each classroom;
  3. Carefully selected easy readers and children’s books for school libraries
  4. Textbooks and books for schools, as resources allow; and

- 5. Provision of basic school supplies such as markers, chart paper, etc.
- Community mobilization in support of reading
- Assistance to schools in setting up after-school reading programs
  - 1. Training for teachers and parents to operate after-school programs; and
  - 2. Experimenting with incentives to encouraging children to attend after-school programs
- Modest investment in Technology/Resource Centers

An alternative option presented would include only an informal out of school program for students in grades one to three needing special assistance in reading.

**Conclusions:**

The team found that there is need and that it is feasible to develop an early grade reading program on the Caribbean Coast. Although the assessment team found that improving reading in the early primary grades is a complex problem requiring a complex response and the challenges are daunting, the recommended program has a real opportunity to make a dramatic difference in the lives of the children and people of Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast.

## SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

### Goal and Purpose of the Assessment

The failure of many children to learn to read is a severe problem in Nicaragua. Overall, about 20 percent of Nicaragua's first grade students do not learn to read well enough to be promoted to the second grade. On Nicaragua's Atlantic coast, teaching early reading skills is made more challenging by multiculturalism and multilingualism (English, Spanish and indigenous languages), and many youth drop out of school with poor or no reading skills and become at-risk and vulnerable to crime and anti-social behavior.

Within this milieu, USAID/Nicaragua commissioned this assessment to explore the possibility of developing a new strategic approach and basic education program that will improve reading performance of children and youth on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. The primary purpose of the assessment team is to investigate the feasibility of developing a new basic education program for under-performing children in reading in primary schools on the Atlantic Coast and to propose recommendations for its design; its secondary purpose is to collect information about the target population, under-performing children in primary school, and the organizations that serve them.

### Methodology

The team used four methods to carry out the assessment, including:

- Document review: The evaluation team reviewed all relevant documents provided by USAID, including an extensive *Reading List for the GEM II Goal 1 Basic Education Assessment*. In addition, the team reviewed other relevant and/or contextual information that could inform the team on key issues such as early grade reading development strategies, USAID strategy or papers, or reviews of Nicaragua's particular economic development and human and institutional capacity requirements (please see Annex 1 for a list of documents consulted);
- Interviews with key stakeholders: At the national level, and at regional and district levels on the Atlantic Coast, the assessment team interviewed about 45 key Ministry of Education (MINED), regional and municipal Education Officers, knowledgeable observers of basic education and Non-Formal Education (NFE), and educational experts in the donor and NGO community (please see Annex 2 for a list of the key people interviewed);
- Group interviews: The assessment team carried out group interviews with proposed direct and indirect beneficiaries for the potential program, including about 50 principals, 42 teachers, and 5 parents (please see Annex 3 for a list of organizations and schools visited); and
- Field observation: Whenever possible the assessment team attempted to observe classrooms, school facilities, the availability of reading materials, teaching techniques, etc. Although most schools were not in session, the assessment team was able to talk to teachers and principals and to get an impression of the issues and obstacles to implementing a reading program in those schools.

The evaluation team used a semi-structured questionnaire for each of nine client groups to guide the interviews. The questionnaires were used as guidance and the interviewers asked more in-depth questions as the interviewee and time permitted (please see Annex 8 for the nine interview guides).

### Constraints to Carrying out the Report

The evaluation team experienced some constraints in carrying out the assessment due to the timing and length of time allowed for the evaluation:

- The assessment was carried out in February, just before the new school year was to begin and when most schools were not in session. As a result, classroom observations were not possible for most schools. Nevertheless, some observations of regular school classes were made at the one school in

session. In those schools not yet open, administrators, principals, and teachers were preparing for the opening of school and generously shared their time and opinions with the assessment team.

- The team carried out the assessment over less than a three-week period, which hampered making appointments with people and limited the number of field visits to the Caribbean Coast. Given the tight interview schedule, visits to the Mining Triangle of Bonanza, Rosita and Siuna were not possible because there were no seats on the limited flights. Moreover, despite our very best effort, the team was not able to interview all the recommended key stakeholders.
- Given the current political situation, USAID does not work directly with the MINED and has limited contact with the central government. Since many education services are delivered by the MINED and all of education in Nicaragua is regulated by the MINED, data collection in some key areas was very difficult.

***Given the circumstances and timing of the evaluation, the team was not able to select a random sample of people for the focus groups. With few appointments, the assessment team was only able to assemble a sample of available interviewees. Although the results of the interviews are not statistically significant with any confidence levels, the consistency of the responses throughout the country left little doubt about the veracity of the information collected.*** Structure of the Report

- Section II will briefly outline basic information about the education sector in Nicaragua including the Ministry of Education (MINED) strategy in early grade reading, the donor's investment plans in education, and the USAID strategy and experience in education in Nicaragua. Section III of the report will present the findings from the assessment of the Caribbean Coast assessment. Section IV will summarize the lessons learned, while Section V will present recommendations about how to address any issues the evaluation team found. Section VI will offer some conclusions about the assessment and proposed program activity.

## SECTION II. BACKGROUND

### Overall Education Sector in Nicaragua

#### 1. The Legal Foundations of the Educational System

Title II of the Nicaraguan constitution establishes that Nicaragua is a multiethnic and multilingual country. It mandates Spanish as the official language of the country, and also has established that Miskitu, Creole, Sumu, Garífuna and Rama are official in the autonomous regions of the Atlantic Coast.

According to the General Law of Education, the Nicaraguan Educational System is composed of five subsystems: a) the Basic Education, Secondary Education and Teacher Training Subsystem, b) the Technical and Professional Education Subsystem, c) the Higher Education Subsystem, d) the Autonomous Education Subsystem of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (SEAR) and e) the Extra-school Education Subsystem.

The Ministry of Education (MINED) is in charge of running the Subsystem of Basic and Secondary Education as well as Teacher Pre-Service Education. Teacher preparation is provided by the Normal Schools, two of which are located on the Caribbean Coast, one in Bilwi and the other one in Bluefields.

#### Structure of the Subsystem

The subsystem under the MINED is called Basic Regular Education; it includes Initial Education (Preschool), Elementary and Secondary. Initial Education serves children who are under 6 years of age. Elementary Education includes Regular Elementary (grades 1 to 6), Multi-grade, Accelerated Basic Education, Education for Adults, and Basic Special Education.

Secondary Education is the third level of Regular Basic Education; it lasts five years, covering grades 7 to 11. It includes Regular Secondary Education, Accelerated Education (usually on Saturday and Sunday) and Distance Secondary Education.

#### 2. National Strategic Plan

The MINED has developed a strategic plan for education for the period 2011 - 2015. Although the strategic plan does not outline a specific strategy for reading in the early grades, there is reason to believe that most proposed activities to improve reading in the early grades are within the MINED strategy. The strategy outlines objectives to: reduce illiteracy; improve the quality of education, especially in the early grades; reduce repetition and dropout rates; improve the capacity of teachers; improve the educational opportunities for indigenous and afro-Nicaraguans; and enhance the skills of the workforce. The MINED has plans to provide texts in first to fourth grade, and is working on a project to preserve coastal languages that are in danger of dying out. It has also prepared curriculum and texts from preschool through fourth grade in languages spoken by indigenous groups and Afro-descendants living in the regions of the Atlantic Coast. Given that an investment to improve the reading skills of children in the Caribbean coast would be consistent with most, if not all, of these objectives, it would appear that the MINED would support an early grade reading program.

#### 3. Reading Policies and Standards

The new curriculum recently elaborated by the Ministry of Education and provided to all schools has identified competencies and their corresponding indicators for every grade and subject. Reading falls within the area of Language and Literature.

To reinforce the monitoring of student achievement in reading, the MINED is working with the *Proyecto de Apoyo al Sector Educativo Nicaragüense* (PASEN II), supported by the World Bank (WB) and *Alianza Global de Educación* (AGE). PASEN II will conduct two standardized tests in the areas of Language and Literature and Mathematics in the years 2013 and 2015. These tests will be administered to a representative sample of students in fourth and sixth grades. Nicaragua also plans to participate in the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s standardized testing in 2013.

#### 4. Teacher Preparation and Responsibilities

The General Law of Education established the legal framework that regulates the training of future teachers at all levels. Future elementary teachers are prepared in Normal Schools. These educational institutions function at the equivalent of the secondary level (grades 7 – 11), and the training lasts five years. There are also Ministry-designed courses (called *Cursos de Profesionalización* in Spanish), that are intended to train non-certified teachers so that they may become certified. Finally, it should be noted that the Ministry of Education offers workshops and seminars in order to keep teachers abreast in their respective fields.

Teachers' responsibilities are prescribed by the Teaching Career Law (*Ley de Carrera Docente*). The law states that teachers must follow government educational policies, maintain ethical behavior and participate in activities to keep abreast in their disciplines, as well as in pedagogical practices.

#### 5. Education Sector in the Atlantic Coast

The educational situation in both Autonomous Regions presents major challenges. From a historical point of view, these are two regions that have been relatively isolated since the Hispanic conquest. The population and its languages have given Nicaragua distinctive characteristics.

It is difficult to deny that, from an educational point of view, this area of the country has been neglected; however, recent historical events seem to promise a better future for these Nicaraguans.

#### 6. SEAR

The *Región Autónoma Atlántica del Norte* (RAAN) and the *Región Autónoma Atlántico del Sur* (RAAS) are autonomous regions that manage the educational subsystem known as the *Sistema Educativo Autónomo Regional* (SEAR). The law establishes the rights of the people of this region to have their own educational model, one that will be pertinent and respond to the specific linguistic and cultural needs of both regions. It also specifies that the educational autonomy of those regions include the legal capacity to organize and manage the educational subsystems in their territories, in accordance with their traditions, value systems and culture, while still coordinating with the national MINED. SEAR is to be implemented in the near future with the financial support of the World Bank. Currently, as part of the regional governmental structure, there is a Secretary of Education in each region who coordinates activities with the MINED.

#### Other Donors Working on Reading in Primary Schools

The donors work together in Nicaragua, and UNICEF is the coordinator of the donor group. Several major donors are focusing on preschool and primary grades, either directly on reading or in ways that will assist reading instruction. The World Bank is focusing on curriculum and materials at the primary level, with an emphasis on multi-grade schools. It is developing elementary textbooks, and will provide training to teachers on the use of the new books.

In the *Proyecto de Apoyo al Sector Educativo Nicaragüense* (PASEN-II), the World Bank will manage the funds from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (*Alianza Global para la Educación*, AGE) to improve preschool opportunities. This will include improvement and construction of preschool classrooms, as well as training of teachers and preschool educators. Availability of more preschool opportunities will improve students' chances for success in reading. The project expects to work in 40 municipalities, in six departments and in both the RAAN and the RAAS. As mentioned above, the PASEN-II project will also be testing students in reading and mathematics in the fourth and sixth grades in 2013 and 2015. The European Union (EU) and World Bank are focusing both on secondary education and on improvement of the management capacity at the preschool level. The EU also plans to work on articulation of basic education with technical professional training.

UNICEF is working with the MINED in a competition involving reading aloud in the early grades. Teacher training in reading is also included in this project. The goal of the competition is for it to be conducted in a way that will be enjoyable and help all children feel like winners. UNICEF is also cooperating with the

MINED on themes that cut across subject areas, such as the environment. These would also have some effect on the reading program. In addition, UNICEF financed a study done by the *Centro de Información y Educativa Sociales* (CIASES) on reading comprehension at the primary level, and is assisting with curriculum development in the SEAR. UNICEF is preparing a program of cooperation for 2013-2017. This plan is paying special attention to the transition from primary to secondary school and the development of flexible ways to address the needs of adolescents, especially those who have been out of school. UNICEF also provided assistance with the MINED Strategic Plan for 2011-2015 (*Plan Estratégico, 2011-2015*).

The International-Development Bank (IDB) has previously focused their work on early childhood, and plans have been under negotiation for continued work at that level. The work at policy level would affect the SEAR, although specific programs would probably not be provided on the Atlantic Coast.

Over the last four years the *Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos* (OEI) has worked extensively in the RAAS and RAAN including, among other things, working with the Normal Schools in Bluefields and Bilwi and the Bluefields Indian & Caribbean University (BICU) to assist teacher training and develop materials, providing literacy and administrative training to municipal and community workers in the Atlantic Coast, as well as developing pedagogical and screening materials for preschool teachers and administrators in the RAAS and the RAAN.

The Spanish Agency for International Cooperation [*Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo* (AECID)], invests mostly in higher education, but also provides assistance at secondary, primary and preschool levels. It has centers on the Atlantic Coast and has worked on a curriculum for indigenous languages.

Table I presents the major donors whose current or planned work involves early reading or contributes to success in early reading. Projects managed by these donors, as described above, will work nationally and also impact the SEAR either through policies that affect the RAAS and the RAAN or through direct intervention in those regions.

**Table I. Donors Working in Reading or Areas Related to Reading**

	<b>World Bank</b>	<b>European Union</b>	<b>UNICEF</b>	<b>OEI</b>	<b>IDB</b>	<b>AECID</b>
Preschool	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Primary	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>
Secondary	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>
Teacher Training	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>		
Adult literacy Training			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>

## **USAID Strategy and USAID/Nicaragua Past Experience**

### **I. Agency Strategy**

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) issued a new Education Strategy for the period 2011-2015 which identifies three goals to guide USAID educational investments. The three goals are: 1) Improved reading skills in primary grades; 2) improved ability of tertiary and workforce development programs to produce workforce relevant skills; and 3) increased equitable access to education in crisis and conflict countries.

The first goal of reading at the primary grade level is an explicit choice to focus on reading improvements and phases out previously funded activities that are no longer seen as core activities, such as early childhood education or secondary education. Areas other than reading, such as math and science, may be indirectly impacted by USAID Missions' programs through system strengthening, such as teacher training, data development and administration, and school management and governance. Nevertheless, the agency

education strategy prioritizes an emphasis on improving reading results within partner country educational systems.

## **2. Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) Region**

Despite recent advances in access to education, educational systems in the Latin America and Caribbean region (LAC) continue to face serious challenges, especially in reading. The overall quality of education is poor, and LAC students consistently score near the bottom on international test comparisons in all fields, including reading.

The compromised quality of education impedes the ability of the region to move forward politically and economically. LAC lags behind its competitors educationally. Young workers in the region enter the labor force with fewer years of education than do workers in countries of similar incomes in Asia and the Middle East. In some of the countries in which USAID works, as many as four out of ten students do not complete primary school, and even more do not go on to secondary school. Of those who enroll in secondary school, at least 40 percent do not graduate. As few as 30 percent of students read and write at grade level. A growing number of youth leave school without basic literacy and life skills and, because of a rise in youth unemployment, are susceptible to joining gangs, committing crimes, and remaining in poverty.

Indigenous, rural, and poor urban students particularly suffer from unequal access to quality education. The responsibility for the high numbers of illiterate children lies partially with the teachers. A good number have not finished secondary school. Many are ill-prepared and have insufficient materials and support in the classroom. The high rate of students who have to repeat a class drains already inadequate education investments.

USAID/LAC is currently designing a new program to strengthen reading as the foundation for all learning. The new program will build on the successes of the Centers of Excellence for Teacher Training (CETT), which provided a model for effective teacher training to upgrade the reading instruction skills of classroom teachers in grades 1, 2, and 3. CETT coordinated with teacher training institutions in LAC to train highly skilled and motivated teachers to give their pupils a strong reading and writing foundation. Since its inception in 2002, CETT trained 35,095 teachers and administrators and helped over 799,300 underprivileged students in 16 countries get a better education.

## **3. USAID/Nicaragua**

Within the LAC as well as the Central America region, Nicaragua consistently ranks near the bottom in nearly every educational indicator. For example, Nicaragua has the lowest rates of matriculation and the highest dropout rates from primary school - indicators, in part, of poor reading skills - in Central America and the LAC region. Within this milieu, the semi-autonomous Atlantic Coast Regions (the RAAN and RAAS) fare even worse. For example, the average number of years of schooling is 2.9 years in the RAAS and 2.3 years in the RAAN (the national average is 5.2 years).<sup>1</sup>

The core of USAID's basic education program in Nicaragua for the last ten years has been the model school program, characterized by its child-centered approach, parent and community involvement and student government activities. There are now 3,000 model schools nationwide, benefitting 454,511 students. USAID/Nicaragua expects to build on the lessons learned in the development of these programs, including those from the Nicaraguan CETT program carried out by the Normal School at Jinotepe, as it seeks to address the issues associated with children underperforming in reading on the Caribbean Coast.

USAID/Nicaragua also invests in several other programs in the education sector. Under the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), USAID provides educational opportunities for at-risk youth

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<sup>1</sup> EDUQUEMOS *Situación y Perspectivas en Nicaragua para Universalizar Primaria de Calidad*, Febrero 2011; and Ministerio de Educacion, *Plan Estratégico*, 2011-2015



through scholarships for children in grades 4-6 and for high school students in three municipalities in Nicaragua's South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) that are highly vulnerable to drug trafficking. And, USAID's Scholarships for Education and Economic Development (SEED) program provided 21 scholarships to young Nicaraguans to study in U.S. universities and community colleges in 2009. From 1991-2008, under the previous CASS Scholarship program, 927 Nicaraguans had the opportunity to study in the U.S.

## SECTION III. FINDINGS ON THE ATLANTIC COAST IN PRIMARY SCHOOL READING

The early grades, especially first grade, are critical for success in reading. Students who fail first grade frequently get discouraged, come to dislike school, and then drop out, sometimes after repeating first grade two or three times. This section first presents data on Nicaragua's countrywide performance on reading tests in the first three grades, since it is important to understand the overall level of reading performance in Nicaraguan primary education. Data presented are from international assessments and from national standardized tests. The information is followed by comparisons between the RAAN and the RAAS and the rest of Nicaragua.

### Nicaragua: Countrywide Data

#### 1. Comparison with other Latin American Countries: SERCE

In mid-2008, UNESCO's Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education evaluated the skills of third and sixth graders in math, reading and science in 16 Latin American countries. This test, The Second Regional Comparative Study, known as SERCE, is the most recent and comprehensive study of the quality of education in the region, and is one of only a few sources of information on early reading in Nicaragua. The mean score on the reading test is 500. The highest scoring of the countries participating was Cuba, with a score of 627. Others in the top tier scored between 510 and 563. Nicaragua's third graders scored 470, which placed them second in a group of countries that scored significantly below the mean. Approximately 44 percent of Nicaraguan third graders scored at the lowest achievement level (1) on the reading test, while fewer than 4 percent scored at the highest level (4). Nicaragua's results and relative placement were very similar for the sixth graders.

Data from the SERCE are not presented by department or region, but comparisons of rural and urban performance are presented. In Nicaragua urban third graders had a mean score advantage of about 30 points over rural students on the tests. Nicaragua ranked 4<sup>th</sup> on this measure out of 17 countries; Cuba had the lowest differential between urban and rural students, around 15 points, while the largest differential was noted in Peru, almost 80. Unfortunately, the study noted that the reason Nicaragua had a low differential was that both urban and rural students performed poorly. Countries' scores were also compared with their per capita income; Nicaragua's GDP per capita was the lowest of all of the countries participating, and its students scored higher than would have been predicted according to Nicaragua's income levels.<sup>2</sup>

Another international test in reading is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is administered to 15 year olds by the OECD. However, Nicaragua has not participated in the PISA testing.

#### 2. Countrywide Assessments of Reading Ability in Nicaragua

Standardized testing at the national level is relatively new in Nicaragua. National standardized tests administered in 2002 by the MINED showed that only 8 percent of third graders and 5 percent of sixth graders were proficient in reading Spanish. Preliminary test results from 2006 showed little change in these scores.<sup>3</sup> However, in 2009, the MINED tested students in grades 4, 6 and 9 in reading and math, with the goal of using these results as a baseline for future testing. Scores were divided into 5 levels. Among fourth graders, 17.9 percent scored at the lowest level, and only 1.1 percent scored at the highest level. The largest percentage, 45.1 percent scored at the "basic" level, which was the second lowest. In general, students in the urban areas scored better than those in rural areas, and girls scored better than boys on the reading test, in all three grades tested.

<sup>2</sup> Ganimian, Alejandro, 2009. *How Much Are Latin American Children Learning: Highlights from the Second Regional Student Achievement Test*. PREAL. Data obtained from UNESCO/OREALC's Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education at: <http://llece.unesco.cl>.

<sup>3</sup> USAID Office of Inspector General, 2008. *Audit of USAID/Nicaragua's Education Activities*, p. 4.

## Comparisons of Reading Achievement within Nicaragua

There are few existing comparisons of reading achievement in the early grades between the Atlantic Coast and the rest of Nicaragua. Data presented below have been assembled from the national standardized tests and from testing done in various donor projects using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA).

### 1. National Standardized Tests

The MINED presented scores by department and region for the 2009 standardized tests. The RAAN and the RAAS were among a group of five departments/regions that had the lowest percentage of students scoring at the highest level on the reading test. With regard to the percentage of students scoring at the lowest level, again the RAAN and the RAAS were among the 5 departments/regions with the highest percentages of students scoring at that level.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)

Recently, the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) has been administered in several selected areas of the country. This is known in Nicaragua as the *Evaluación de Lectura Inicial* (ELI). (See Annex 5 for a description of the EGRA.)

The EGRA was administered in the RAAN and RAAS in 2009 in a sample of 40 schools that included 121 teachers, 35 school principals and 1692 students. The tests were administered in Spanish, Miskito, Panamahka and Creole, the version of English spoken by many Afro-descendants in the Caribbean. The sections of the test that students found most difficult were the ones involving phonemic awareness. These include recognizing the sound of the initial letter in a word and recognizing the sound of a letter. In Nicaragua, some indigenous languages pronounce certain phonemes differently, while others do not exist. For example, some Nicaraguan indigenous groups pronounce “f” as if it were a “p.” Although the EGRA tests developed in other languages are designed to reflect accurately pronunciation in those languages, such differences in pronunciation or lack of existence of certain phonemes would be expected to affect the test scores of students who speak indigenous languages but have been instructed and/or tested in Spanish or English.

Recent research indicates that phonemic awareness is a key ingredient in learning to read, and recommendations are that it be taught orally very early in kindergarten or first grade. Paradoxically, although Spanish has a much more regular sound-symbol relationship than English, it has not been customary in most of Latin America to teach letter sounds; the focus has typically been on letter names and on learning to read syllables.

Another section of the EGRA where children experienced difficulties was the fluency test, in which students are asked to read aloud a short passage at an appropriate level for their grade. Fluency is important because students who read too slowly and haltingly usually cannot make any sense of what they are reading. Thus, for most readers, a certain level of fluency is necessary for comprehension. Among 337 first graders tested in Spanish, 30.8 percent could not read any part of the text. Among the 217 Miskito students, who were tested in Miskito, 85 percent were not able to read the selection. On the positive side, it was noted that students did better as they moved up through the grades. On the Spanish test, first graders read correctly 17 words per minute, while in third grade they read 54.9 words per minute. In Miskito students moved from 2.3 words per minute to 33 words per minute in third grade. It is important to note that test results are not comparable between languages, because some languages are more complex and take longer when learning to read. The Miskitos have an oral culture, and did better in oral comprehension, when the passages in Miskito were read to them and they answered oral questions about the reading.

Overall, however, the results were well below standards per grade level. In Spanish it is desirable that students be able to read 60 words per minute by the end of second grade, and 90 at the end of third. In this

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<sup>4</sup> MINED 2010. *Plan Estratégico de Educación*, 2011-2015, P.34, 35 (the tests were administered in 2009 but reported in 2010).

study only 15.7 percent of first grade students tested in Spanish reached or surpassed the expected standard.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to understand how the EGRA results in the RAAN and the RAAS compare with those of students in the rest of Nicaragua. Two studies were done in 2011 to establish base line EGRA data for other projects. One was for schools being served by the project *Fundación Zamora Terán*. The EGRA was administered in 13 municipalities in the departments of Boaco, Carazo, Chinandega, Chontales, Granada, León, Managua, Masaya and Rivas. Urban students comprised 70 percent of the sample, while 30 percent of the students were rural. The test can be administered at three points during the school year and has standards for each of the three points in time. This testing was done in the middle of the year. The results indicated that the major difficulties of the students were in reading comprehension, alphabetic code, fluency and phonemic awareness (*conciencia fonológica*).

The standards in Spanish for mid-year in first grade are that a student should be able to read at least 20 words per minute; by the middle of second the standard is 50 words per minute, and by the middle of third grade, students should be able to read fluently 70 words per minute. In the *Fundación Zamora* study, 25 percent of first graders met or exceeded the standard. At second grade, this figure rose to 50 percent, while in third grade 46 percent met or exceeded the standard.<sup>6</sup>

A similar study was conducted in September 2011 to establish baseline data for schools being served by an AMCHAM project. For this study the EGRA was administered in Chinandega, León, Managua, Matagalpa, Masaya and Rivas. The group included 39 percent rural students and 61 percent urban. Using mid-year norms, 25 percent of first graders met or exceeded international norms, as did 52 percent of second graders and 49 percent of third graders.<sup>7</sup>

Although these studies were undertaken at different points in time, it may be noted that first and second grade students in the EGRA testing in the RAAS and RAAN demonstrated more needs in early reading than did students in the other parts of Nicaragua. See Table 2 for a comparison of performance of Spanish readers on the Atlantic Coast with those in other departments of Nicaragua.

**Table 2. Percentage of Spanish-Speaking Students at or above International Standard in Oral Reading Fluency in Spanish on the EGRA, on the Atlantic Coast and in Other Departments of Nicaragua**

	<b>RAAN and RAAS Oct., Nov. 2009 (End of Year Norms)</b>	<b>Other Departments, Fundación Zamora July, Aug. 2011 (Mid-Year Norms)</b>	<b>Other Departments AMCHAM July, Sept. 2011 (Mid-Year Norms)</b>
Grade One	15.7%	25%	25%
Grade Two	35.6%	50%	52%
Grade Three	50.8%	46%	49%

These data include only Spanish-speaking children, and the testing was done at different points in time. Also, the two projects were serving populations selected as needing help. Therefore, the data are not directly comparable, but are illustrative of the needs in the RAAN and the RAAS. It may be noticed that in Grade 3 Spanish speaking children on the Atlantic Coast performed better than those in the other departments. This may illustrate the positive effect of remaining in school. However, other data previously presented in this report also indicate higher dropout rates in the RAAN and RAAS, so it may also be possible that students doing less well had left school by third grade. The many speakers of other languages in the RAAN and RAAS

<sup>5</sup> Castro, Laguna and Vijil, 2009. *Informe de Resultados: ELI Caribe*. CIASES.

<sup>6</sup> Castillo, Melba y Vijil, Josefina. 2011. *Informe de Resultados de la Aplicación Prueba EGRA a una muestra de estudiantes de Primero a Tercer grado de escuelas beneficiarias de la Fundación Zamora Terán*.

<sup>7</sup> Castillo, Melba, Vijil, Josefina. 2011. *Informe de Resultados de la Aplicación Prueba EGRA*. AMCHAM

are not included in the comparison, which simply means that the relative need for assistance in early reading in the RAAN and RAAS is even greater than suggested by these data.

### **Factors Contributing to Children's Difficulty in Learning to Read**

There are many factors that contribute to a child's interest in reading and success in learning to read. These include adequate nutrition and good health, a warm home and parenting environment, many pleasant opportunities to enjoy books and stories during the child's preschool years, experiences and ample discussion about those experiences that provide a child with a wide vocabulary and knowledge about the world. This section first presents socioeconomic factors, especially those linked with poverty, and then outlines factors that contribute to a child's success or failure in school.

#### **I. Socioeconomic factors**

Unfortunately, many children in the RAAN and the RAAS live in an environment of poverty or extreme poverty in which there is a cluster of factors that combine to make it difficult for a child to experience success in school. The following are factors that are commonly noted in environments of poverty around the world. Not all may apply to children in the RAAN and RAAS, but many are likely to be relevant. All of these factors affect children's ability to learn to read successfully.

- Poor nutrition, sometimes extreme, with stunting of growth found in areas of severe poverty.<sup>8</sup>
- Health problems, including untreated vision and hearing problems, and internal parasites, which are extremely common in many poor children.
- Speech and language problems or learning disabilities that go unrecognized and untreated. This is typically a problem in areas of poverty around the world. Teachers expressed concerns about how to help children who seemed to have learning difficulties.
- Lack of experience with print. This may include illiterate parents and no books or print materials in the home, and for rural children, no print in the surrounding environment.
- Absence of a culture of reading in the general environment. This problem was mentioned by many in the RAAN and the RAAS. Few reading materials are available, and many people lack the habit of reading for either information or pleasure.
- Lack of enriching experiences, such as trips or visits to interesting local sites that would serve to give the child more knowledge and broaden his/her vocabulary.
- Absence of parents, who may go to other countries to obtain work or must work long hours, leaving children in the care of grandparents or others who might not be able to adequately monitor school performance and assist children with their schoolwork. This is a frequent occurrence on the Atlantic Coast.
- The need for the child to work in order to supplement meager family incomes. Some children in the RAAN and RAAS are needed to help the family with agricultural work in certain seasons.
- Parenting styles that might sometimes involve physical punishment, and/or may involve little discussion that would help a child build vocabulary and concepts. This is a problem in any culture, and many poor parents have little time to discuss issues and help their children develop new concepts and vocabulary, which are the underpinning for reading.

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<sup>8</sup> In Nicaragua, 35.2 percent of the lowest income quintile and 25.8 percent of the second lowest income quintile showed moderate to severe stunting. World Bank, *Socio-Economic Differences in Health, Nutrition and Population, 2001*.

## 2. School Factors

Many children are fortunate enough to attend excellent preschool programs, and then to be in primary schools with excellent facilities, a wealth of materials, computers, and experienced, effective teachers. However, children in impoverished environments all too often receive very inadequate schooling. The following are common factors in the RAAN and the RAAS that contribute to difficulties in learning to read.

- Lack of preschool experience. A rich preschool experience is much more important for a child who has no experience with print in his environment. In preschool, the child can learn to enjoy being read to and discussing stories, may have opportunities to draw and begin to experiment with writing, and above all should have opportunities to talk and expand his language and vocabulary. Without preschool, many children come to school with no concept of what reading is all about, and may be utterly baffled if asked to learn letters or do activities that have no meaning for them.
- Poor match between the child's language and culture and that of the school. Research shows clearly that a child learns to read most easily in the language he speaks at home. Although it is specified that children should be taught to read in their mother tongue in Nicaragua, lack of resources and trained teachers means that for many this is not a possibility. Teachers may also convey the attitude that the children's home language is inferior. It is noted that many parents may have the same attitude, as they want their children to learn the "mainstream" language that they feel will lead to better employment; more communication with parents is needed on this topic.
- Quality of teachers. Excellent teachers are vital in making the difference for needy students in the RAAN and the RAAS. Unfortunately, there are many untrained teachers in the schools, and the quality of pre-service education even for certified teachers is questionable, especially in the area of teaching reading. Normal School teachers commented that they find their students, soon to be teachers, entering from secondary school, do not read and write well, and they have had to set up special courses for them.
- Lack of training for teachers on strategies for teaching reading. Even most trained teachers have had little training in specific strategies for teaching the essential components of early reading and writing, or of how to improve children's vocabulary and develop their comprehension and critical thinking skills.
- Lack of varied instructional strategies. Expert teachers know a variety of methods to use to reach students of differing needs. Unfortunately, differentiating instruction to meet the needs of students is one of the most difficult skills for teachers to learn. Most instruction in the RAAN and RAAS is directed at the whole class. Teachers need to learn a variety of approaches, and know when to select which approach for an individual or group of students. They also need a variety of materials available to use in providing such instruction.
- Lack of a culture of assessment. With evidence-based decision-making, teachers are able to diagnose children's needs and pinpoint instruction to meet those needs. Teachers need to learn how to assess children's progress and keep track of their progress through the year. In addition they need to learn how to use assessment results to improve children's learning.
- Ineffective Use of Time. Time on task has been shown to be one of the most important variables for improving student learning. This refers not only to the length of the school day, but also to how time is used during the day. It also refers not only to teacher time, but to how effectively time is used by each student. Some students finish their work quickly and spend much of the day sitting doing nothing while they wait for others to finish. When few books or other resources are available, it is difficult for teachers to make sure all students are actively engaged in learning experiences during most of their school day. Another way in which many students lose time on task in the RAAN and the RAAS is through absences from school, because of rain, because of distance from the school, or because they may need to help the family or to work to earn money.

- Lack of materials. The dearth of materials in the RAAN and the RAAS is notable. Some teachers have just a few precious textbooks to be shared among all their students. Many have no teaching supplies, and must purchase them themselves if they want to provide activities for the children. Some classrooms that were observed had no materials available at all, nor did they have any storage facilities or even teacher desks in some rooms. This is a particularly difficult situation for teachers who often have very little training.
- Child-friendly atmosphere. Children do best in a supportive climate; learning involves taking some risks, and harsh treatment tends both to discourage timid children from taking risks and to cause rebellion and misbehavior in stronger-willed pupils. One particularly important aspect of a positive classroom climate is the teacher's treatment of student errors. Effective teachers try to understand the child's thinking and to help the child think through his response to a question. A school census in 2007 listed the reasons students dropped out. One common response was "lack of interest."<sup>9</sup> A child who is in a negative environment may well wish to drop out.
- Availability of schooling. Two other reasons frequently listed for dropping out in the Census mentioned above were that the school had closed or that there was no teacher available.
- Absence of Technology. Many communities in the RAAN and RAAS are characterized by their isolation and distance from populous areas. Yet most have some access to the internet. Computers are very appealing to children, and, if available, could provide access to the broader world for both teachers and students. One needs to know how to read to use a computer; and there are also many lesson plans available on the internet that teachers could download, as well as software for teaching reading that would appeal to children.

### **Availability of Programs to Address Reading Issues**

There are many ways to help students who are having difficulty learning to read. Ideally such a student needs more time on task and a patient, knowledgeable teacher who is able to diagnose a student's special needs and who has a variety of special materials and strategies for helping a student learn. The following are some possible options for providing the help needed:

- Differentiation of instruction during the school day. Providing different assignments to different individuals or groups of students means that some children may work independently while the teacher works with an individual or small group. Unfortunately, this is difficult to manage for poorly trained teachers who have few or no resources at their disposal. For example, without books, it is not possible to give children an independent reading assignment.
- Providing extra help after school. Teachers reported that they have been asked to stay for an hour several afternoons each week to provide help to students who are falling behind. They seemed willing to do this; however, it was not possible to observe how this extra time was used. Some teachers reported that they had the children come to their homes for the extra help, either because the teachers had young children to care for or because there was no space for the tutoring in the school. Both teachers and principals thought an after school program in reading would be a good idea. Teachers expressed willingness to work in such a program, and said that they would need training. Many recommended that an after-school program should be fun for children, with reinforcement activities designed in a way that might involve acting out of stories, drama, games, etc. Many also recommended the provision of a snack.
- Having older students, or parents assist students. It can be very effective to have older students assist younger ones, or to have trained parents come into the classroom to help some children. No such arrangements were reported to the team in the RAAN or RAAS. However, USAID's *Excelencia*

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<sup>9</sup> MINED, *Censo Escolar 2007; Informes de los Departamentos y Regiones Autónomas*

Project had a component using student monitors that worked well. In addition, FADCANIC's Education for Success Project has an activity in which mentoring is done by older youth.

- After-school reinforcement activities. RTI, working through Project Zamora Terán, provides after-school reinforcement activities in reading in the RAAS in connection with the "One laptop per child" program. These reinforcement activities are done in the alternate session; that is, children in the morning session attend in the afternoon, and vice versa. This project is developing a whole curriculum for after-school reading. They pointed out the necessity of having a careful process for screening and selection of students to participate in an after-school program.
- After-school enrichment programs. The Padre Fabretto Project also offers after-school programs for students, in the alternate session, for 3 or 4 hours daily. They help children in reading and math, but also engage in a wide variety of other activities, such as drama, music, dance and arts. They provide small libraries, have reading clubs, and work on comprehension. They prefer to train people from outside the school, whom they find to be more flexible and innovative. They do not work on the Atlantic Coast. They emphasized that such a program must be done in coordination with the teacher and should complement the teacher's work.
- Provision of teacher training and reading materials. AMCHAM works through the RTI Alianza project to provide teacher training specifically in the teaching of reading, in 100 schools. They used specialists from USAID's CETT program to train the trainers, and also use the APA method from USAID's Project *Excelencia*. They give small sets of storybooks to teachers in the primary grades. They have not worked on the Atlantic Coast, though they have an interest in doing so.
- Involving Normal School students. Normal School teacher trainers explained that their students have to spend a certain amount of time doing community work, and they thought the students would be interested in helping in after-school programs.



## SECTION IV. LESSONS LEARNED

There are a myriad of lessons learned from the assessment, our research, and from the collected experience of the assessment team. These lessons learned are offered as helpful hints for consideration in the design as well as for successful implementation of the proposed program, and may help to explain the rationale for the recommended project.

1. Start small and build on success. There are a number of factors that might make this a difficult program to implement. The Caribbean Coast (the RAAS and the RAAN) of Nicaragua is worlds apart, culturally, from the more developed Pacific side. Population and schools are sparse and widely distributed in a few towns and transportation is difficult and relatively expensive. There are at least four sizable language/ethnic groups (Mestizo, Creole, Miskito, and Mayangna) that have different cultures and traditions. All of these factors and more suggest that the program should proceed in phases with work starting in the easiest area (RAAS) first.
2. Build on past programs. Over the last 20 years, USAID/Nicaragua has developed a number of valuable approaches in school governance, reading methods, intercultural bilingual education, and child-centered approaches under the *Excelencia*, *Base*, and *CETT* programs. For example, there are some excellent materials, teaching methods and reading tests that could be easily adapted and used as appropriate materials for the Caribbean Coast. USAID should review these programs for cost-saving approaches.
3. Establish a baseline and evaluation methodology before project is implemented. The proposed program offers ample opportunities to experiment with different approaches. Early establishment of the evaluation methods and collection of the required baseline data will enable the clear measurements of results and impact of the program and gain the Mission kudos under the new Agency Evaluation Policy.
4. Change takes time. Fundamentally, teacher training is asking people to make behavior changes. Behavior change takes time. As a result, it is unlikely that the program will see impact immediately and it may be unrealistic to assume that one teacher training series of workshops will be sufficient. The program design should include follow up programs with teachers to reinforce the initial training and create greater and longer-lasting impact.
5. Culture of Reading/Community Involvement. Most schools and communities on the Caribbean coast have lost their culture of reading and many communities have few resources to practice reading. Other communities have very strong oral traditions. It may be possible to develop a greater culture of reading by involving parents, grandparents and the community in the translation of oral stories into written works.
6. Teacher cooperation and reflection. Teachers benefit from opportunities to work together to solve problems and reflect on their experience. Teacher circles and peer observations are both excellent ways for teachers to learn new strategies and reflect on their experience.
7. Establish a Team. It is important that the principal and several teachers in a school experience training together; this creates a supportive environment in the school that fosters teamwork and the willingness to try new methodologies. We need to create a team change agent within the schools.
8. Integrated Approach works best. Although there is a myriad of possible program options, there is no one answer to solve all the intertwined educational problems in the RAAN and the RASS. Therefore, the assessment team recommends a program of four mutually reinforcing components.

## SECTION V. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommended Option: Working with the GON

There are a number of options open to the Mission to implement a program to improve reading in grades 1 to 3 in the Caribbean Coast Region. The option selected depends, in part, on the resources available to the Mission as well as the number of management units the Mission can manage successfully. It would appear that there are two clear-cut needs – materials and teacher training – with a number of other important-but-not-essential elements that could be added to the program. As a result, the Mission could invest in only one of the truly critical needs, such as only reading materials or only teacher training. Correspondingly, the Mission could only invest in a combination of reading materials and teacher training. The recommendation shown below includes all the components the assessment team believes are essential for a successful program working with the GON in the Caribbean Coast but they are also included to demonstrate the variety of elements that the Mission could consider. The elements are prioritized by the importance of the investment, with the most important first.

### I. Prioritized Program Components

#### a) Teacher Training

Given the importance of teachers in the process of learning to read, teacher training should be the first priority of the project design. Since pre-service teacher training in Nicaragua reviews the teaching of reading in a general sense but does not go into much detail, most teachers in Nicaragua need to review the fundamental components of teaching reading. Teachers also stated that they have not had exposure to methods for teaching reading for different language/cultural groups or for different learning styles. As a result, the teacher training program should, at a minimum, train teachers for different learning styles and different language/cultural groups, as needed. The assessment team also recommends that the teacher training program should train at least one teacher at each school more intensively in reading methods so that person can act as a resource teacher in reading for the school, run the after-school or pull-out program at the school, and learn how to involve the community and parents in the reading programs.

Several other elements may be considered for inclusion in the teacher training component. Most teachers informally conduct an assessment of the child's ability to read by asking the child to read in class. Generally, these assessments are not systematic in any way and the results from different children cannot be meaningfully compared. Moreover, the informal testing largely ignores reading comprehension, which is the most important aspect of reading. The informal testing of children's reading by the teacher does not allow any formal tracking of the student's progress or diagnose in any depth any problems the child may have. For these reasons, the proposed program should use any one of the several more formal tests developed and validated by CETT, EGRA, or *Excelencia* for measuring and diagnosing reading, and teachers should be trained in the uses and interpretation of these test. The use of these assessments will also allow USAID to develop useful indicators of progress. In addition, the proposed program design suggests the development of a "toolbox"<sup>10</sup> of teacher materials and training in how to use the items in the toolbox. Also, it is essential that teachers be trained in the use of pedagogical strategies for teaching reading to meet the varying needs of students.

To recap, the elements of the teaching training program should be:

- Training teachers in the five fundamental components of reading;<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Although the elements of the toolbox should be based on a detailed examination of teachers' needs, the toolbox should include, among other things, easily applied tests to diagnose reading problems in children, manuals and helpful hints on how to address various reading problems and for different learning styles, exemplary lesson plans to capture discouraged reader's interest, and a wide variety of materials and techniques for teaching reading.

<sup>11</sup> Please see Annex 6.

- Training teachers to use varying strategies for teaching reading to students from different language/cultural groups, with different learning styles and at different levels, within the regular classroom setting;
- Training reading specialist/resource persons who will run and organize the after-school or pull-out reading programs, and serve as a resource to the school and community;
- Training teachers to use assessment tools to determine reading levels and track student progress; and
- Training teachers to utilize a materials and pedagogical toolbox.

b) Materials

Given the dearth of materials in most Caribbean Coast classrooms, the provision of reading materials should be considered a near-equal priority for the proposed program. The argument for more materials was made by everyone from education system administrators to principals to teachers to parents.

Most teachers and administrators made a case for textbooks and library materials. The development of textbooks, however, is complex and expensive and the program might be better served by using the funds to adapt already developed materials. Moreover, textbooks sometimes get locked up in the principal's office and may not be used in practice. As a result, the assessment team recommends developing other learning materials first and textbooks only as resources allow.

As noted earlier, the assessment team suggests developing a toolbox of materials and providing pedagogical strategies to assist teachers in teaching students how to read. Schools on the Caribbean coast are nearly devoid of materials of any kind as the GON appears to be under-investing in primary education. The idea of the toolbox is not so much to supplement the lack of resources as it is to enhance the ability of teachers to develop their own innovative materials to solve the reading problems of the children they serve. Included in the toolbox might be a standard set of materials to address most contingencies as well as ideas for ways in which teachers can develop low-cost materials to assist underperforming children to learn to read.

The program might also provide a modest, small "reading corner" focused on the first three grades that would feature easily readable books, reading learning materials, stories, games, workbooks, etc. that teachers and children could use during idle time or as part of a regular lesson. Given the sparsely furnished classrooms, some consideration must be given to providing, or encouraging parents to provide, storage facilities.

The program should also consider providing easy readers and other children's books oriented toward grades 1 to 3 in a school library, if it exists. Some teachers state that they bring their classes to school libraries to acquaint the children with the library and its contents. Unfortunately, most of the schools have few such resources to share and most of those are oriented toward older readers.

The elements of the materials component should be:

- A "toolbox" of materials and pedagogical hints for teachers
- Mini Reading Corners for each classroom;
- Carefully selected easy readers and children's books for school libraries;
- Textbooks and books for schools, as resources allow; and
- Provision of basic school supplies such as markers, chart paper, etc.

### c) Community Mobilization<sup>12</sup> in Support of Reading

There is a lot of enthusiasm for improving reading on the Caribbean coast, especially among teachers. Nevertheless, teachers cannot solve all the problems in the schools, and parents need to be involved and help their children to learn to read. Those parents that know how to read can assist their children in overcoming their reading problems, and parents who cannot read themselves can ask their children to read to them, assist the teachers in running the after-school programs, build storage facilities for books and materials and provide stories in the oral tradition that might be turned into reading material. Teachers should be trained to encourage community support for the after-school reading program, and the program could mount a modest social marketing campaign in support of the reading program.

Elements of the Community Mobilization program might include:

- Social marketing campaign; and
- Training for teachers in how to encourage community participation in the reading program.

### d) Assist Schools to Set Up After-School Reading Programs

The student/teacher ratio and classroom utilization varies widely across the Caribbean Coast. Some schools had student/teacher ratios of 18 to 1, while other schools had student/teacher ratios of nearly 50 to 1. Some schools ran double shifts but claimed to have space for after-school programs, while other schools ran triple shifts and claimed to have no space for after-school program but could offer pull-out programs with some difficulty. Given the wide variation in the circumstances of the schools, it would seem that the potential and ideal educational program would need to offer a flexible agenda of after-school, pull-out, and/or Saturday or Sunday classes to assist underperforming readers. This may be a good area in which to conduct controlled experiments to determine which methods work best to improve the reading skills of underperforming students.

Under these circumstances, the potential program will need to train the reading resource teachers to operate the appropriate reading program for each school and, once the program is operational, the potential program will need to monitor progress of the reading programs. If after-school programs are offered, most observers argued that they will need to provide some incentives to attract the children who have already gone home and may need incentives to return to school. The program should experiment with all kinds of incentives, but most observers recommended a snack and/or activities that were fun and also would encourage the children to read. Other suggested incentives included games and reading competitions to attract children.

Elements of the After-School Reading Program would include:

- Training for teachers and parents to operate after-school programs; and
- Experimenting with incentives to encouraging children to attend after-school programs

### e) Modest Investment in Technology/Resource Centers

The Caribbean Coast is a vast area of largely uninhabitable wetlands (*humedales*) punctuated by occasional small fishing villages and distribution centers. Despite their relative isolation, most of these population centers have access to the internet through satellite communication. Schools, teachers, and students, however, do not have computers/printers or satellite subscriptions to access to Internet.

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<sup>12</sup> Although the discussion centers on the role of parents in assisting teachers to better support reading, the program should involve all community actors including municipal, religious, communal, youth and business leaders to change the way the community thinks about reading and school. All these leaders should be encouraged to become involved in the program to improve reading and their involvement should lead to a greater probability of program success and sustainability.

As resources permit, the assessment team recommends modest investments in computer/printer combinations and/or teacher resource centers in selected population centers to primarily allow teacher access to the wealth of reading materials, lesson plans, and pedagogical materials available to assist children to read. Modest investments in computers to be placed in schools might allow underperforming children to practice reading using programmed materials. This might be an area for private sector involvement in the program.

The element of the technology component could include:

- Limited purchase of computers/printers in selected locations to allow teachers and students access to the Internet; and
- Access to the internet during the life of the project.

## 2. Description of Program

The following is a description of the proposed program. It includes two aspects: 1) Training and materials for all Grade 1 to 3 teachers in the RAAN and RAAS; and 2) An after-school or pull-out program for students who are having difficulty in learning to read. Following are some suggestions for each of these.

**General training and materials.** It is recommended that the training and materials incorporate successful practices and materials from previous USAID projects, such as the CETT and Excelencia. Adaptation of such materials must be done creatively, in ways that minimize cost, to ensure sustainability of the project by local stakeholders. However, quality of materials must be safeguarded, since excellent materials are a key input to reading success. With regard to reading instruction specifically, it should incorporate internationally accepted best practices. (See Annex 6, a list of Best Practices in Teaching Reading, which is accompanied by a glossary.) The training should also be offered to principals and MINED supervisors, and should include follow-up in the classroom. It is recommended that the program include some authentic assessments such as portfolios of children's writing.

**After-School or Pull-out Programs.** There will need to be flexibility in determining which practice is followed in any given school. Where space is available, programs may be offered in a classroom during each session, for children who attended school in the other session. In schools with no space, a pull-out program or programs on Saturday or Sunday were suggested.

Regardless of the location, the programs should be run by Reading Resource Teachers who have had additional training in how to diagnose and meet individual student needs. There will need to be a clearly defined process for selecting the neediest students. The overall goal is that children should learn to enjoy reading – that is, the program should address key skill needs, but in a way that is fun for the children. Thus, teachers should read stories to children and encourage them to discuss and draw or write about the stories. There should be games that incorporate key concepts in word attack skills or comprehension. Children could act out stories. Children should do original writing, and could write down stories or oral traditions they hear from their parents and grandparents. These could be made into little booklets and form part of a small library. If computers are available, some children could engage in reading and writing activities on a computer while the teacher works with other children.

Some aspects would be different between the two types of program. The after-school or extended day program will include a larger group, and could take advantage of assistance from Normal School students or parents trained to assist. Most likely a snack should be provided, possibly with some involvement of parents.

Children could be taken on small excursions to learn about their community. For example, they might learn what work adults do, perhaps walking to a store or interviewing a fisherman. Such activities could be followed by group or individual discussion, drawing and writing about the experience.

On the other hand, pull-out tutoring in the school day might involve individual or small groups of children, usually for 45 minutes to an hour. The activities could be similar. Although some larger group activities, such as drama, might not be possible in the pull-out option, it does provide more direct teacher attention

to needy children. With some program flexibility, other options might be developed to suit the needs of individual schools. With an appropriate evaluation design, it would be possible to compare results in various types of program.

Plans for sustainability will of course need to be incorporated into the design of the potential program plan. The following elements of the proposed program would help to promote sustainability:

- Effective training of teachers that includes follow-up, participation of principals and supervisors helps to create ownership of programs. Also, sustainability is facilitated when groups of teachers work together, producing a culture of change.
- Commitment from education leaders helps incorporation of programs into official structures
- Involvement of parents and community helps insure that local stakeholders become more involved in the school and assist in maintaining schools and equipment.

### **Alternative Option: Non-formal Out-of-School Program**

The following option is presented as an alternative that would permit the Mission to give assistance in early reading to underperforming students while working outside the framework of the public school system. In this option a program would be offered outside of school for students in grades 1-3 who are having difficulty in learning to read. This program could be offered on school days during hours when children are not in school, or might be offered on Saturdays and Sundays and during school vacations. The program would have to be flexible, allowing different timing according to the space available and needs of each community.

### **I. Prioritized Program Components**

#### **a) Training of Special Reading Teachers for the Program**

The persons selected to teach the program will need

- Intensive training in the fundamental components of teaching reading.
- Training on how to diagnose reading difficulties and plan effective instruction for different learning styles and different language/cultural groups, as needed.
- Basic techniques of screening and assessment, for two purposes:
  - To select the students in most need of the program, and
  - To establish baseline data and enable measurement of student progress in the programs.
- Training on how to effectively involve the community and parents in the reading programs.
- Training on how to use materials.

#### **b) Materials**

Each program should be equipped with a basic set of games and materials, for example:

- Reading games and manipulatives such as flash cards, letter blocks, etc.,
- Reading textbooks in appropriate languages and levels,
- An ample library of colorful, appealing children's books,
- Basic supplies such as paper, notebooks, markers, white boards, chart stands, large chart paper, etc.,
- Small tables and chairs and storage cabinets if these are not available in environment provided,

- Supplementary items such as voice recorders, recordings of children's books, and
- Possible provision of computers and other technology, to enrich the program and encourage children's reading through use of special reading software and possibly use of the internet.

c) Community Mobilization in Support of Reading

As mentioned in the first option, it would be desirable that the after-school program promote reading in the community, by offering occasional special events such as "reading walks," brief plays or displays of student writing.

## 2. Special Challenges

Operating a program outside the school system would provide several challenges. The most important relates to communication with the school. It is not uncommon for children in schools to receive special tutoring outside of school hours. In those instances, the children benefit if there is good communication between the tutor and the teachers. The following sorts of communication would be desirable:

- Recommendations from teachers of children who need the program. The program staff could receive the recommendations, and administer a basic screening instrument so as to select the neediest students. It would also be desirable that parents be permitted to apply to have their children screened for admission to the program.
- Periodic conferences with the teachers, as well as with the children's parents
- Invitations for parents and teachers to special events
- If circumstances permit, offering special sessions on selected topics in early reading to principals and teachers.

Another question is whether it would be permissible to hire public school teachers to work during non-school hours to run the programs. This would undoubtedly be desirable if it is deemed permissible. Alternatively, teachers from private schools or persons from the community could be selected and given training to become Special Reading Teachers.

A third question is whether it would be possible to use the school building for running such programs if no other space is available. This might either be determined by an overall policy, or could be determined by individual communities.

## 3. Description of Program

The description of the proposed program is basically the same as that for the after-school program already described. For convenience, that description is briefly summarized here:

**General training and materials.** It is recommended that the training and materials incorporate successful practices and materials from previous USAID projects, adapted to be economical and sustainable in the local contexts. With regard to reading instruction specifically, it should incorporate internationally accepted best practices to the extent that these fit the more informal out of school scenario. (See Annex 6, a list of Best Practices in Teaching Reading, which is accompanied by a glossary.) It is recommended that the program include some authentic assessments, for example, portfolios of children's writing.

**After-School or Weekend Programs.** Where space is available, programs may be offered in each session, for children who attended school in the other session. Alternatives might include programs on Saturday or Sunday or during school vacations.

Whatever the format, the programs should be run by Special Reading Teachers who have had training in how to diagnose and meet individual student needs. There will need to be a clearly defined policy and process for selection of students. The overall goal is that children should learn to enjoy reading – that is, the program should address key skill needs, but in a way that is fun for the children. Thus, teachers should

read stories to children and encourage them to discuss and draw or write about the stories. There should be games that incorporate key concepts in word attack skills or comprehension. Children could act out stories. Children should do original writing, and might write down stories or oral traditions they hear from their parents and grandparents. These could be made into little booklets and form part of a small library. If computers are available, they have great appeal for children, some of whom could engage in reading and writing activities on a computer while the teacher works with other children.

The program would include children from grades 1-3, and the number of children would determine how many teachers and assistants are needed. The adult-student ratio should be kept low enough so that ample assistance to individuals and small groups of children can be provided. The program should take advantage of assistance from community members or parents trained to assist. Most likely a snack should be provided, possibly with the assistance of parents.

Children could be taken on small excursions to learn about their community. For example, they might learn what work adults do, perhaps walking to a store or interviewing a fisherman. Such activities could be followed by group or individual discussion, drawing and writing about the experience.

Issues of sustainability become much more difficult in the alternative option. However, the following could assist with sustainability:

- Training in reading of program personnel would provide a core of knowledgeable individuals in each community.
- There could be a “demonstration effect” if an informal, out of school program is successful at assisting students in becoming better readers.
- To the extent that community and local organizations are involved, they may help to sustain programs.

### **Possible Indicators for Reading Program, Either Option**

NB: Given the limited resources available for the program, USAID may wish to limit each of the indicators below to only data derived from USG-supported schools

Goal One: Improving reading skills for X children in primary grades by 2015

#### General

- Repetition Rates, grades 1-3, Caribbean Coast
- Dropout Rates, grades 1-3, Caribbean Coast
- Number of learners receiving reading interventions at the primary level (M/F)
- Number of learners receiving reading interventions in special programs (after-school, pull-out) (M/F)
- Proportion of students who, by the end of two grades of primary schooling, demonstrate that they can read and understand the meaning of grade level text (collected by M/F)
- Proportion of students who, by the end of three grades are able to read and demonstrate understanding as defined by Nicaragua’s curriculum or standards (collected by M/F)
- Number of schools with appropriate programs (after-school, pull-out, Saturday/Sunday) assisting underperforming children in reading
- Number of action research activities in after-school reading programs conducted
- Number of impact evaluations conducted



Component one: Teacher Training

- Number of administrators, officials and principals trained in reading methods with USG support (M/F)
- Number of teachers/educators/teaching assistants who successfully completed in-service training in reading (M/F)
- Number of teachers or teaching assistants who received intensive coaching or mentoring in reading with USG support (M/F)

Component two: Materials

- Number of teaching and learning materials provided in reading with USG assistance
- Number of reading “toolboxes” provided to teachers and teaching assistants with USG assistance
- Number of textbooks provided with USG assistance
- Number of children’s fiction or non-fiction books provided with USG assistance

Component three: Testing and Tracking

- Number of standardized learning assessments supported by USG
- Number of schools with reading performance monitoring systems in place with USG support

Component four: Community involvement

- Number of parents and community members participating in school reading programs (M/F)

Component five: Communications Technology

- Number of schools using Information and Communication Technology due to USG support
- Number of teachers using Information and Communication Technology due to USG support
- Number of students using Information and Communications Technology in reading programs due to USG support (M/F)

## **SECTION VI. CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this assessment was to collect and analyze information from interviews, document review and observation about the need and the feasibility of developing a new basic education program for underperforming children in reading in the first three grades on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. Not surprisingly, the assessment confirmed the intuition of USAID officers that there is a real need to improve reading in primary schools on the Caribbean Coast. The assessment team found that reading achievement on the Caribbean coast was among the worst in the country. The team also found that it is indeed feasible to develop a program in early grade reading and principals and teachers in the region are anxious to participate and improve reading programs.

The assessment also found that improving reading in the early primary grades is a complex problem requiring a complex response. There does not appear to be any one intervention that might dramatically improve reading. Instead, the assessment found that there were five key factors that should be addressed in a new program if it is to be fully successful. A proposed program includes five components: 1) teacher training in how to teach reading to different levels and different ethnic/language groups; 2) provision of learning materials, 3) after-school and/or pull-out programs for underperforming children, 4) community mobilization in support of the reading program; and 5) selected and limited investments in ICT technology to link the teachers and students in the region to the outside world. Although the challenges are daunting, the proposed program has a real opportunity to make a dramatic difference in the lives of the children and people of Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast.

## **ANNEXES**

**Annex 1: Documents Consulted**

**Annex 2: List of Key Individuals Interviewed**

**Annex 3: List of Organizations and Schools Visited**

**Annex 4: Educational Data**

**Annex 5: Educational Tests Available**

**Annex 6: Best Practices in Literacy Instruction, with Glossary**

**Annex 7: Potential Implementation Partners**

**Annex 8: Interview Guides**

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## Annex 2 List of Key Individuals Interviewed

### Ministry of Education (MINED) Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte (RAAN)

Name	Affiliation
Jessica Rocha	Secretaria Regional de Educación – RAAN Regional Education Secretary
Sheldon López	MINED Education Delegate – RAAN
Centuriano Knight	Director of the Planning Office of the Regional Government-RAAN
Mara Rivas Williams	Coordinator of the Regional Government-RAAN
Benalicia Lucas	Director, Luxembourg Normal School

### Ministry of Education (MINED) Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur (RAAS)

Name	Affiliation
Nubia Ordóñez	Secretary of Education – RAAS Regional Education Secretary
Oscar Aburto	MINED Education Delegate –RAAS
Roy Patterson	Técnico Regional-RAAS Regional Staff - RAAS
Irene Cuthhbert Gordon	Coordinator OSHC-RAAS
Heidi Flories Pantín	Education Delegate, Kukra Hill
David Sanchez	Director of Statistics, MINED

### Normal Schools and Tertiary Education

Name	Affiliation
Ada Villarreal	Director of Communication, University of the Autonomous Region of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN)
Gustavo Castro	Rector, Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU)



<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Arlen Fogot	Coordinator of the Area of Education and Humanities (BICU)
Rosa Carcache (and 6 other professors)	Professor of Educational Technology-Normal School Rigoberto Cabezas

### **Education Donor Community**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Anyoli Sanabria	Education Officer –UNICEF
Robert Panamo Sandino	Education Officer - UNICEF
Carmen Largaespada	Director, Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos (OEI)
Silvia Grande	Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (AECID (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation)

### **Non-Governmental/Private Voluntary Organizations**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Melba Castillo	Education Specialist, Centro de Información, Acción y Educativa Social (CIASES)_
Josefina Vigil	Education Specialist, Centro de Información, Acción y Educativa Social (CIASES)
Rosa María Vivas,	Executive Director, Foro Educativo Nicaragüense Eduquemos

### **Project Partners**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Peter Schaller	Project Coordinator, Youth Expanding their Future (Project .Fabreto Children's Foundation)
Carolina Castro	Chief of Party, Alliance 2 Project, Research Triangle Institute (RTI)
Gertrudys Mayorga	Alliance 2 Project, Research Triangle Institute (RTI)
Ray Hooker	President, Fundación para la Autonomía y Desarrollo de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua (FADCANIC); Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua
Lisa Powell	Pedagogical advisor for FADCANIC-RAAS
Hazel Wilson	Education, Coordinator, FADCANIC-RAAS

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**Private Sector**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Máximo Estupiñán Maldonado	Project Coordinator of AMCHAM Education Committee, American/Nicaraguan Chamber of Commerce/ <i>Cámara de Comercio Americana Nicaragüense</i>

**Educators Interviewed on the Atlantic Coast**

<b>Nº</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Location / School</b>
1	First grade teacher	Escuela Dinamarca-Bluefields
2	First grade teacher	Escuela Dinamarca-Bluefields
3	Social science teacher	Escuela Normal Rigoberto Cabezas-Bluefields
4	Information Technology Professor	Escuela Normal Rigoberto Cabezas-Bluefields
5	Teacher, Miskito	Escuela Normal Rigoberto Cabezas-Bluefields
6	Professor, Language and Communication - Spanish	Escuela Normal Rigoberto Cabezas-Bluefields
7	Professor, Language and Communication - Spanish	Escuela Normal Rigoberto Cabezas-Bluefields
8	Mother of student	Escuela Beulah Lightburn, Pearl Lagoon
9	Mother of first and third grader	Escuela Beulah Lightburn-Pearl Lagoon
10	6 <sup>th</sup> grade teacher	Escuela Beulah Lightburn-Pearl Lagoon
11	Peace Corps volunteer	Escuela Beulah Lightburn-Pearl Lagoon
12	Coordinator	Pearl Lagoon Academy of Excellence
13	Teacher	Pearl Lagoon Academy of Excellence
14	Teacher	Pearl Lagoon Academy of Excellence

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15	Coordinator	Pearl Lagoon Academy of Excellence
16	First Grade Teacher	Escuela Padre Hugo Heizen-Kukra-Hill
17	First Grade Teacher	Escuela Padre Hugo Heizen-Kukra-Hill

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### **Annex 3. List of Institutions Visited**

Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development) (AECID)

American Nicaraguan/Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM)

Bluefields Indian & Caribbean University (BICU)

Catholic School System, Bluefields

Centro de Información, Acción Educativa Social (Information Center for Education and Social Action) (CIASES)

Escuela Beulah Lightburn - Laguna de Perlas (Beulah Lightburn School – Pearl Lagoon)

Escuela Dinamarca – Bluefields (Denmark School – Bluefields)

Escuela Normal Rigoberto Cabezas (Rigoberto Cabezas Normal School)

Escuela Padre Hugo Heizen - Kukra Hill (Father Hugo Heizen School – Kukra Hill)

Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, UNICEF)

Foro Educativo Nicaraguense EDUQUEMOS (EDUQUEMOS , Nicaraguan Educational Forum)

Fundacion para la Autonomia y Desarrollo de la Costa Atlantica – FADCANIC (Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Atlantic Coast)

Fundacion Zamora Terán (Zamora Teran Foundation)

Gobierno Regional Autónomo del Atlántico Norte (Regional Autonomous Government of the North Atlantic) RAAN

Gobierno Regional Autonomo del Atlántico Sur (Regional Autonomous Government of the South Atlantic) RAAS

Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Publicas (Institute for Strategic Studies and Public Policies)

Normal School Gran Ducado de Luxemburgo (Grand Duchy of Luxembourg Normal School)

Ministerio de Educación – MINED (Ministry of Education) in RAAN and RAAS

Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos –OEI Organization of Iberoamerican States

Academia de Excelencia en Laguna de Perlas (Pearl Lagoon Academy of Excellence - PLACE)

Fundacion Padre Fabretto (Father Fabretto Foundation)

Research Triangle Institute (RTI)

Escuela Elemental Santa Marta (Saint Martha Elementary School)

Sistema Educativo Autonómico Regional (Regional Autonomous Educational System) SEAR

Union Europea (European Union) EU

United States Agency for International Development, USAID

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Universidad de la Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe de de Nicaragua – URACCAN (University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua)

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## Annex 4. Elementary Education In The RAAN And RAAS

### Selected Education Statistics of the North Atlantic Region (RAAN)

The RAAN is divided into eight municipalities: Waspan, Prinzapolka, Puerto Cabezas, Bonanza, Rosita, Waslala, Siuna, and Mulukuku. According to the 2007 Municipal Educational Index (IEEM) elaborated by the National Statistics System (SEN), Waspan is classified as Very Good, and is ranked fourth according to the general classification of the country. It has high rates of coverage in preschool and elementary, low repetition rates in elementary and low dropout rates. Of the other municipalities, two were classified as Good, two as Regular, and three as Deficient. Indicators for the municipalities in the RAAN are presented below.

#### SELECTED INDICATORS FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION - RAAN

Municipalities	Repetition Rates	Dropout Rates	Promotion Rates	IEEM	Rank	Classification.
Waspan	2.7	08.2	89.3	7.4	4	Very Good
Prinzapolka	7.0	01.2	82.2	5.0	17	Good
Puerto Cabezas (Bilwi)	10.0	14.0	83.0	1.0	75	Good
Bonanza	8.8	19.5	84.9	-1.1	99	Regular
Rosita	9.4	21.9	82.3	-3.2	122	Regular
Waslala	6.7	24.3	80.4	-7.8	141	Deficient
Siuna	6.8	23.8	86.9	-8.0	143	Deficient
Mulukuku	3.6	10.2	87.5	-11.2	148	Deficient
<b>National rates for 1999</b>		<b>07.1</b>	<b>92.8</b>			

The figures in the table above illustrate the challenges that the RAAN faces at the elementary level in the years ahead:

- Waspan has high coverage, low repetition and dropout rates. It needs to improve its promotion rates.
- Prinzapolka, needs to improve its promotion rates.
- Puerto Cabezas (Bilwi), Bonanza and Rosita need to reduce repetition and dropout rates and improve its promotion rates.
- Waslala, has an acceptable repetition rate; however it needs to reduce its dropout and improve its promotion rates.
- Siuna has an acceptable repetition rate. It needs to reduce its dropout and improve its promotion rates.
- Mulukuku needs to reduce its dropout and increase its promotion rates.

### Education Statistics of the South Atlantic Region (RAAS)

The RAAS is divided into twelve municipalities: Corn Island, El Ayote, Bluefields, Laguna de Perlas, Desembocadura del Rio Grande, Nueva Guinea, Muelle de los Bueyes, Kukra Hill, El Rama, El Tortuguero, Paiwas and La Cruz del Rio Grande. According to the 2007 Municipal Educational Index (IEEM) elaborated by the National Statistics System (SEN), Corn Island is classified as a good municipality, and is ranked ninth among municipalities in the RAAS. El Ayote was also classified as good while seven others were classified as regular and three as deficient.

### SELECTED INDICATORS FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION – RAAS

Municipalities	Repetition Rates	Dropout Rates	Promotion Rates	IEEM	Rank	Classification
Corn Island	9.6	13.7	80.1	5.6	9	Good
El Ayote	1.4	11.7	90.4	6.3	13	Good
Bluefields	9.5	23.0	82.3	-0.4	92	Regular
Laguna de Perlas	3.4	13.0	80.0	-1.2	100	Regular
Desembocadura del Rio Grande	10.8	36.0	82.2	-1.6	105	Regular
Nueva Guinea	7.5	16.7	78.2	-1.9	110	Regular
Muelle de los Bueyes	8.6	11.6	81.9	-2.3	113	Regular
Kukra Hill	3.4	16.0	77.0	-4.5	129	Regular
El Rama	12.4	17.8	77.3	-5.6	137	Regular
El Tortuguero	8.6	30.4	76.1	-7.9	142	Deficient
Paiwas	13.1	15.6	74.4	-8.7	146	Deficient
La Cruz del Rio Grande	4.2	30.0	75.6	-8.7	153	Deficient
<b>National rates for 1999</b>		<b>07.1</b>	<b>92.8</b>			

As the table illustrates, these are some of the challenges faced in the RAAS at the elementary level:

- Corn Island shows a high repetition rate, high dropout rate and low promotion rate.
- El Ayote shows low repetition and acceptable promotion rates. It needs to reduce its dropout rate.
- Bluefields shows a high enrollment rate. Its challenges are a high repetition rate, a high dropout rate and a low promotion rate.
- Laguna de Perlas shows a low repetition rate. It needs to reduce its high dropout and improve its promotion rates.
- Desembocadura del Rio Grande has a high enrollment rate. It needs to reduce its repetition and dropout rates and improve its promotion rates.

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- Nueva Guinea needs to reduce its dropout and improve its promotion rates.
  - Muelle de los Bueyes faces the challenge of reducing its high dropout rate and improving its low promotion rates.
  - Kukra Hill has a low repetition rate. It faces the challenge of reducing its dropout rate and improving its promotion rates.
  - El Rama presents high repetition rates. It needs to reduce its dropout rate and improve its promotion rates.
  - El Tortuguero faces the challenges of a high repetition rate, and it also needs to reduce its dropout and improve its promotion rates.
  - The municipality of Paiwas presents high repetition and dropout rates and a low promotion rate.
  - La Cruz del Rio Grande has a low repetition rate. It needs to reduce its high dropout rate and improve its low promotion rates.



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## Annex 5. Information about Available Reading Tests

### Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)

For many years there has been a dearth of reading assessments suitable for use in the early primary grades in developing countries around the world. To meet this need, the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) was developed in recent years by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI), in cooperation with USAID and the World Bank. It is a test that is administered individually to students in about 15 minutes; it includes measures of early reading skills such as phonemic awareness, knowledge of letter names and sounds, oral reading of short texts, and brief measures of oral reading comprehension and listening comprehension. Comprehension questions focus only on literal comprehension. The instrument has been translated and validated for use in many languages. In Nicaragua these include Spanish, Creole, Miskito, Mayangna and Panamahka.

The EGRA is particularly useful because it contains a measure of reading fluency: the number of words a child can read aloud in one minute. Reading fluency is important because people can only hold a limited number of letters or words in mind at one time; therefore children who read very slowly usually have limited comprehension of what they read. See Table 1 for sample reading speeds in grades 1-3 in Standard English in the United States. The comprehension measures are very limited; this assessment is useful for screening children in grades 1-3, but is not adequate for assessing higher-level comprehension skills. Also, nothing can be learned from the EGRA about a child's proficiency in silent reading.

Languages vary in their difficulty for beginning readers; therefore comparisons across linguistic groups cannot be made reliably.

**Table 1. EGRA Reading Norms for English-Speaking Students in the US<sup>13</sup>**  
Norms for words correctly read per minute (WCPM) by students at different percentiles

Percentiles	Grade One – Spring (end of year) WCPM	Grade Two – Spring WCPM	Grade Three Spring WCPM
75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	82	117	137
50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	53	89	107
25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	28	61	78

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<sup>13</sup> Early Grade Reading Assessment Toolkit, Annex A, available at:  
[http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1038/Early\\_Grade\\_Reading\\_Assessment\\_Toolkit\\_EN.pdf](http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1038/Early_Grade_Reading_Assessment_Toolkit_EN.pdf)

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### **Testing done by the Ministry of Education**

The Ministry administered tests in reading at grades 4, 6, and 9 in 2009, to serve as a baseline for future testing. Further testing in reading is planned for fourth and sixth grades in 2013 and 2015.

### **Tests and other materials available from USAID projects:**

CETT materials in Spanish: The CETT in both Central America and the Andes developed assessments, teacher guides and student materials that could be of great use in this project.

CETT materials in English: The Caribbean CETT also developed assessments and other materials that could be of use for the Creole-speaking population on the Atlantic Coast.

Tests from Project Excelencia: Project Excelencia served schools on the Atlantic Coast. Assessments were carefully developed for at least two purposes, and could prove very useful in this proposed project:

- Achievement tests for third graders in reading and math were developed for use in schools that were validating the new MINED curriculum. They were also used to assess achievement of schools in the program.
- Formative assessments for third graders in reading and math were developed for use by teachers. Teachers were trained to use these assessments three times a year in class, and to record the results in order to plan instruction to meet student needs. They were also provided with special teacher guides on how to provide instruction targeted to individual needs identified by the assessment.

Tests from Project BASE: The team was informed that Project BASE developed reading tests in Miskito and Mayangna.

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## **Annex 6. Best Practices in the Teaching Of Early Literacy<sup>14</sup>**

### **PART ONE: AT THE CLASSROOM LEVEL – TEACHING PRACTICE**

#### **I. Reflective Practice**

- A. Teacher is reflective about practice, able to articulate philosophy of reading and to explain why he/she chooses different approaches at different times and for different children
- B. Teachers work with each other, discussing lessons, problems, strategies and ways to improve their practice. They may engage in peer observations

#### **II. Diagnostic Approach with Ongoing Formative Evaluation**

The teacher bases planning, instruction and instructional groupings on the needs of students. Perception of needs is based on the use of both formal and informal diagnostic assessments, and on informal observation of students, teacher note taking as students read, etc. Students' errors are understood as "windows on their thinking" and are used diagnostically. Teacher is able to place students on a developmental continuum and identify strengths and difficulties of individual students.

#### **III. Use of Features of Effective Instruction**

The teacher incorporates features of effective instruction during literacy instruction. To help students build a strong foundation in literacy, teachers introduce concepts systematically and explicitly, building on previously taught concepts. To ensure that students understand the tasks they are asked to complete, the teacher uses explicit language to introduce new concepts, models key skills (such as how to identify a new word, how to identify the main idea, and main aspects of the writing process). To ensure that students practice and learn the new concepts or skills, teachers provide students guided practice in which they have multiple opportunities to practice newly acquired skills in isolation and in context, while providing them positive corrective feedback and scaffolding as needed by students. To help students generalize the use of concepts and skills, teachers provide students independent practice that includes opportunities to practice emerging reading and writing skills independently in accord with their experiences and interests as well as opportunities to talk about what they are learning.

#### **IV. Inclusion of Key Components of Literacy Instruction**

Reading and language arts instruction includes all the essential elements in an age appropriate manner with age appropriate materials. Teachers demonstrate the use of the diagnostic approach and effective features of instruction (Items II and III above) as they teach this content. Teachers integrate the key elements, often in a thematic approach linking reading and writing to themes in other subject areas (health, social studies, etc.). Instruction and activities are linked to children's own experience, and take into consideration different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Teachers provide systematic provision of key skills, but also take advantage of "teachable moments" to reinforce skills and understandings.

The literacy program includes:

- Oral Language: Students are engaged in oral language activities throughout the day and for different purposes
- Motivation to learn, and understanding of purposes for, written language:

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<sup>14</sup> This instrument was developed by Aguirre International for use in evaluating USAID CETT programs. It is accompanied by a Glossary of the terms used.

- 
- Daily reading aloud to children, by teacher, parents or older students
  - Many daily opportunities for children to look at and read books and other print material at their level and in accord with their experience and interests
  - Phonemic awareness activities are provided in a game-like manner, as needed by children:
    - Systematic instruction in phonemic awareness activities initially with a decrease as students become proficient
    - Focus on phonemic awareness skills that have the most impact: initial sounds early on, the blending and segmenting of words at the phoneme level
    - Integration of phonemic awareness skills into other areas such as writing
  - Phonics:
    - Systematic instruction in decoding and word recognition skills, linked to meaningful text, based on children's identified needs.
    - Opportunities to practice emerging skills in controlled text and to generalize skills to other text
  - Vocabulary and concept development:
    - Teachers provide activities to increase student vocabulary and concept development
    - Students are taught strategies for independent vocabulary and concept development
  - Support for students who are not fluent in the language of instruction, in all key areas of reading and language arts
  - Comprehension:
    - Systematic instruction in comprehension, research and study skills in context
    - Instruction in comprehension strategies to use before, during, and after reading text
    - Development of listening comprehension skills
    - Attention to higher-level comprehension skills, problem-solving, question-asking
  - Fluency:
    - Use of fluency building activities, such as word banks, repeated readings, etc.
  - Writing:
    - Students engaged in writing activities throughout the day, for a variety of purposes
    - Original writing by students on a daily basis, e.g., journals, personal experiences. (Invented spelling allowed in first grade to encourage development of phonemic awareness)
    - Students receive systematic instruction in the mechanics of writing
    - Linkages as appropriate with content areas

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## **V. Effective and Smooth Classroom Management**

### **A. Organizational Patterns:**

1. Grouping. Students have been taught to work independently, alone, with partners, or in small groups. Instruction varies between whole class, small group work or individual work; teacher may work with one student or small group while others work independently. Groups may vary from day to day as teacher assembles those who may need to work on a certain task or skill.
2. Differentiated Instruction. Children work on tasks of varying difficulty, in accordance with their individual needs and abilities. The teacher works separately with some individuals or groups as appropriate.

**B. Use of Resources:** Teacher effectively uses a variety of resources of high interest to children. Print material is available at various reading levels. Teacher and student-made materials are designed to meet students' special interests and needs.

**C. Use of Students' Time:** Time is used effectively: When students first enter or when they finish tasks they have other activities open to them, such as interest centers, books to read, journals to write in, games, etc. Transitions between activities are smooth and take little time.

**D. Organization of Physical Space:** The physical space in the classroom is well-organized and attractive, with interest centers, displays of children's work, needed materials available for use, many books and other reading materials available.

## **VI. Positive Classroom Climate**

The climate is positive, with praise for good performance and a warm and friendly feeling. Teachers respond in positive ways to student errors. Students are encouraged to assist each other, and they have a voice in classroom decisions.

## **VII. Effective Classroom Behavior Management**

Children participate in formulation of rules for classroom behavior. The rules are stated in positive terms so that students understand the behavior desired. The teacher reminds students of the rules as needed, consistently enforces them, and consequences are understood and are appropriate.

## **VIII. Positive Relations with Parents and Community**

Parents and/or guardians are encouraged to visit and assist in the classroom. They are knowledgeable about their children's schoolwork and assist with reading tasks at home.

## **PART TWO: AT THE SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEVEL**

### **I. Role of Principal**

The principal is an effective instructional leader, knowledgeable about the reading process. He/she sees role as provider of support to teachers, as well as a facilitator of interactions between teachers. The principal works with community and with the educational system to procure needed resources for an effective reading program.

### **II. Role of Trainers**

Trainers visit classrooms and are seen as resources and coaches. Teachers seek them out for help and for needed resources. They assist teachers in forming networks or partnerships.

### **III. Role of Reading Specialists and/or District Support Staff**

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Reading specialists and supervisors are knowledgeable about the reading/language arts process and are adept both at coaching teachers and at running small workshops as needed for teachers. They assist in communication between schools, may help set up peer observations, etc. Their services are sought after by principals and teachers.

### **PART THREE: LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN BILINGUAL, MULTI-CULTURAL PROGRAMS**

All of the above items apply to special bilingual, multicultural programs. However, additional items should be added, as appropriate to the programs, for specific aspects of bilingual instruction, including the teaching of a second language to the child as specified in the given country and program.

**Comprehension** includes understanding of both oral and written language. Comprehension of oral language is often referred to as listening comprehension. Activities to improve comprehension may also involve understanding of dramas, TV shows, videotapes, etc. Instruction in reading, listening or viewing comprehension means actively teaching students the use of comprehension strategies, not just asking questions.

Examples of comprehension strategies include making and checking on predictions, using graphics, understanding the main idea, summarizing, learning to use the structure of narrative or expository text to aid in understanding, etc.

**Contrived Opportunities to Engage in Oral Language** (Item 2.a.) are not natural conversation or exchange of information or ideas,

Example: teacher gives a pattern sentence such as I like \_\_\_\_\_ and students repeat the sentence filling in the blank.

**Controlled Text** (Item 2.d.) is carefully selected to be text the student will be able to decode, and might include familiar words from stories read or other activities, or words from student writing that fit the desired patterns.

**Corrective Feedback** (Item 1) is immediate and appropriate feedback to incorrect responses, such as questions, prompts, clarification, and encouragement to help students focus on the task.

Example: The teacher asks students to determine if a word begins with a given sound such as /m/. If students answer incorrectly, teacher would provide a prompt. "We are identifying words that begin with /m/. Say /m/." Then question, "Does pat begin with /m/?"

**Feedback, non-specific** (Item 1) indicates answer was wrong but does not provide information to help the student improve his or her understanding, deepen his or her thinking or formulate the desired response.

Examples: 'that's wrong,' 'try again,' 'you know that,' or calling on another child when student fails to answer or provides incorrect response.

**Explicit Language, Guided Practice, Independent Practice** (Item 1) Teacher uses clear language in appropriate sequence, provides practice with sufficient examples at students' level, provides time, appropriate examples and guidance during independent practice.

Example: teacher "not proficient" in the use of explicit language, guided practice independent practice—language is not clear or not well sequenced, teacher does not

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provide enough examples, examples are not directly related to task, sufficient opportunities are not given to practice with guidance from the teacher.

**Fluency** (Item 2.g) is a combination of reading rate and accuracy when reading text orally. Techniques for improving fluency include providing children with banks of cards to practice reading, games (e.g., bingo) encouraging quick identification of words, repeated readings of the same text, and activities such as “Reader’s Theater,” in which children are given parts in a story and read it aloud to others.

**Instruction** refers to actively teaching students a skill or concept.

**Invented Spelling** is a term used in English to refer to the early stages of writing in which children spell words as they sound. At early stages, children leave out letters and frequently use letter names to represent sounds (ex: hs for house; tabl for table). Research shows that children’s phonemic awareness is developed if they are allowed to use invented spelling in the very early stages of writing, for personal writing such as journals or first drafts. (It is recommended that all writing for “publication” be edited.)

**Phoneme** is the smallest unit of sound that distinguishes between words in a given language.

**Phonemic Awareness** (Item 2.c.) is the most complex skill within phonological awareness and includes the combination, manipulation, and segmenting words at the phoneme level.

Example: Activities might include; “Tell the sounds in pat. What words do the following sounds form /p/ /a/ /t/? What word do we get if we take the /p/ off of pat? What word do we get if we add /s/ at the end of pat?”

**Phonics** (Item 2.d.) is instruction in how sounds in spoken language are represented by letters and spellings. Phonics instruction includes a continuum of skills: letter recognition, alphabetic principle, decoding and blending words, and spelling. Instruction will be in isolation and in context.

**Phonological Awareness** is the recognition of the sounds of spoken language and how they can be combined, manipulated, and separated. This is different, and separate from, recognition of sound-symbol relationships. In terms of segmenting words, there is a continuum of difficulty in which syllables are easiest followed by onset/rime and finally phonemes.

**Onset and Rime** are terms used to describe parts of one-syllable words in English.

- **Onset** refers to the initial consonant(s).
- **Rime** is the part of a syllable that includes the vowel and consonant(s) following the initial consonant(s).

**Oral Language Activities** (Item 2.a.) are activities designed to encourage the child to produce or initiate language.

**Contrived or inauthentic oral language opportunities** (Item 2.a.) are not natural conversation or exchange of information or ideas. Example: the teacher gives a sentence pattern like “I like \_\_\_\_\_” and the students repeat the sentence, filling in what is missing.

**Rhyme** involves matching the ending sounds of words.

**Scaffolding** (Item 1) means adjusting and extending instruction up or down (teachers’ language, tasks, materials, group size, etc.) so the student is challenged and learns new skills.

Example: When a student first learns a skill, the teacher will provide more examples, more guided practice, may work individually or in small groups with students needing

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more help. As the student becomes more proficient, he/she will need less scaffolding and will therefore work more independently.

**Vocabulary Development** (explicit) is direct instruction on word meanings, practice with use of words in sentences.

***Indirect opportunities to develop vocabulary*** (Item 2.c.) means providing students with experiences that give them opportunities to learn new words and concepts.

Examples: Students learn new vocabulary from wide reading. The more they read, more likely they are to learn new vocabulary. Other ways to develop vocabulary indirectly could include participation in special activities such as field trips or community projects in which new words or concepts are learned, listening to visiting parents tell about their work, listening to and discussing stories told or read, etc.

**Writing** means the construction of meaning in printed form, rather than work on penmanship, copying single words or filling in blanks with a few letters.

**Writing Mechanics** refers to grammar (syntax, complete sentences, punctuation, etc.) and spelling and as one aspect of writing instruction.

**Writing Process** includes the following steps: prewriting (generating ideas & organizing ideas), drafting (first pass, focus on content), revising (revising of draft after conference with teacher or peer, focus on content, sentence structure and organization), editing (focus on spelling, capitalization), and final copy.

**Writers' Workshop** is a process in which students are provided feedback on their writing at each step by either the teacher or peers.



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## **Annex 7: Potential Implementation Partners**

The assessment team met with a variety of potential partner organization for the implementation of a reading program on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. Initially, USAID asked that we orally brief them about these potential partners, which we did at the debriefing. About three months later as the final report was approved, USAID asked that we include the list in an annex of the report. Given the fact that considerable time has passed since the first draft was completed, it was difficult for the team to develop a comprehensive list that fully describes the partners. However, we have listed those organizations we can recall and provided a brief review of the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. The organizations are listed in priority order, with the best candidate listed first and the least likely last.

- 1) **FADCANIC:** Strong, well-established organization with good people and good expertise in the subject area. Organization has excellent understanding of the Atlantic Coast region and of education issues. Appears to be very strong in RAAS but weaker in RAAN. Organization has strong leadership and management which may be crucial to the success of the program.
- 2) **Organización de Estados Ibéricos (OEI) (Organization of Iberoamerican States):** Has long history of work in literacy issues. Located at MINED and associated with Ministry but autonomous, having worked for IDB and Spanish Aid organizations. Appeared to have good management, leadership, organization and capacity in education.
- 3) **Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU):** Very eager to work in the area as the university was created to address areas related to this proposed program. Appeared to have some good professionals but its organizational, managerial, and technical capacity is unproven.
- 4) **Normal Schools in RAAN and RAAS:** Both institutions have some experience offering in-service teacher training programs but very limited experience and appeared to be weak organizationally, managerially and technically.
- 5) **Catholic Schools:** The team had limited success meeting with the organization. It has a strong presence in the region and some assets to implement teacher training and appeared eager to cooperate but technical and management expertise are unknown to the team.
- 6) **Moravian schools:** Strong presence in the region but the team did not meet with them.
- 7) **University of the Autonomous States of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URRACAN):** Eager to work in the subject area and has some expertise but very limited capacity.
- 8) **American Chamber of Commerce/Nicaragua (AMCHAM):** Has some limited experience working as a sub-contractor under USAID programs and is eager but has limited capacity and no experience on Atlantic Coast.
- 9) **RAAS/RAAN:** A few good people struggling with limited support, no resources, no mandate, and a somewhat dysfunctional organizational structure.

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## Annex 8: Interview Guides



### INTERVIEW GUIDE

### FOR MINED STAFF AND SUPERVISORS

Interviewer(s)

Date:

Position of Participant(s)

Name:

M\_\_F\_\_

Village/Town/City:

Region:

Objective: Discuss (*conversar*) plans and programs in areas of interest, and explore possible interest in collaboration.

Thank you for giving time for this interview. We are consultants for USAID who are on a fact finding mission to explore the possible need for an after school program in literacy (*lectoescritura*) to help underperforming primary grade students in the Atlantic Region. All responses are confidential, and will be used to help us make appropriate recommendations.

Please describe your role in the Ministry. Do you work especially with: literacy; at-risk students; intercultural bilingual programs? If other, please describe.

What standards for primary grade reading and writing are in place, and how are they used?

What data on student achievement in reading is regularly available that could be used in a program to assist underperforming students? (Collect samples, if available, including any materials available in Spanish, Creole, Miskito, Mayangna or Rama)

What materials are available for teaching reading and writing, in what languages?

Do you feel there is a need for an after-school literacy (*lectoescritura*) program or other types of programs for children in the Atlantic Region? (Why? What are the factors causing this need?)

Are you aware of programs already in place that address the needs of these students? Please describe them.

If you were going to design an after-school program for these students, what kind of activities would you include?

In what languages do you think such a program should be offered?

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Do you think the children would come to an after-school program? What factors might keep them from coming? What incentives would motivate them to come? (games, a meal?)

Do you think parents would be supportive of such a program?

Do you think teachers, parents or young adults would be interested in working as teachers or facilitators in such a program? Why or why not?

What training do you think they would need to prepare them for such work? (Is there a general need for specialized training in reading?)

Can you recommend NGOs or community service organizations that might have the necessary expertise and interest in running such programs?

We've heard about SEAR. Could you please outline to us its role and functions? Please describe its effect on your work.

Is there anything else you might like to tell us that we have not asked you?

Do you have any questions for us?



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## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### FOR UNIVERSITY OR NORMAL SCHOOL STAFF OR OTHER TRAINERS

Interviewer(s)

Date:

Name of Institution:

Position of Participant(s)

Name:

M\_\_F\_\_

Village/Town/City:

Region:

Objective: Learn what they teach in the area of literacy (*lectoescritura*) and find out what resources they have that might contribute to a possible program.

Thank you for giving time for this interview. We are consultants for USAID who are on a fact-finding mission to explore the possible need for an after school program in literacy (*lectoescritura*) to help underperforming primary grade students in the Atlantic Region. All responses are confidential, and will be used to help us make appropriate recommendations.

1. Please describe your role in your institution. Do you work especially with: literacy (*lectoescritura*); underperforming students; intercultural bilingual programs? If other, please describe.
2. Please outline your programs for training teachers to teach reading and writing.
3. What capacity does your institution have in the area of assessing reading achievement?
4. (If person is a trainer) Please describe your experience as a trainer.
5. Do you feel there is a need for an after-school literacy (*lectoescritura*) program or other types of programs for children in the Atlantic Region?
6. Are you aware of programs already in place that address the needs of these students? Please describe them.
7. If you were going to design an after-school program for these students, what kind of activities would you include?
8. In what languages do you think such a program should be offered?

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9. Do you think teachers, parents or young adults would be in working as teachers or facilitators in such a program? Why or why not? What training do you think they would need to prepare them for such work?
  10. Might students of your institution be interested in doing internships in such programs?
  11. Do you have staff who would be qualified and interested in providing training to prepare teachers or facilitators to work in such programs?
  12. Can you recommend NGOs or community service organizations that might have the necessary expertise and interest in running such programs?
  13. We've heard about SEAR. Could you please outline to us its role and functions? Please describe its effect on your work.
  14. Is there anything else you might like to tell us that we have not asked you?
  15. Do you have any questions for us?



## INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PRINCIPALS

Interviewers:

Date:

Name of Principal

OR: No. of Principals in Group: M\_\_\_F\_\_\_

School Name:

No. of students:

Type of school: Regular Elementary; Multigrade; Intercultural Bilingual

Village/Town/City

Region:

Objective: To learn more about the problems and issues in reading instruction in their schools, and to gather ideas for possible programming.

Thank you for giving time for this interview. We are consultants for USAID who are on a fact-finding mission to explore the possible need for an after school program in literacy (*lectoescritura*) to help underperforming primary grade students in the Atlantic Region. All responses are confidential, and will be used to help us make appropriate recommendations.

1. Tell us a bit about your background(s). Where did you study? What grades did you teach before becoming a principal? How long have you been a principal?
2. What language do your students speak at home? At school?
3. Please describe the reading program in your school. (What methods and materials do you use to teach reading in your school?)
4. Do you have children in your school that are not reading, or that need help with reading? (How many?) In your view, what are the factors causing these reading problems? Do you have suggestions for ways to address these factors?
5. What grades do you worry about most? What ages do you think would most benefit from an after-school program?
6. Are there already after-school programs offered in this neighborhood (or district or town)? Please describe them.
7. If you were going to design an after-school program for underperforming students, what kind of activities would you include? What other suggestions do you have for such a program? for (training, special materials, other)

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8. In what languages do you think such a program should be offered?
  9. Do you think the children would come to an after-school program? What factors might keep them from coming? What incentives might encourage them to come? (games, a meal?)
  10. Do you think parents would be supportive of such a program? (If no: What could be done to interest them? If yes: Do you think they would be interested in helping?)
  11. Do you think any of your teachers would be interested in being a teacher or facilitator in such a program? Why or why not? What training do you think they would need to prepare them to work in such a program?
  12. We've heard about SEAR. Could you please outline to us its role and functions? Please describe its effect on your work.
  13. Is there anything else you would like to tell us? Is there anything you would like to ask us?



## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### FOR ONE OR MORE TEACHERS

Interviewers:

Date:

Name of Teacher:

OR: Number of Teachers in group: M\_\_\_F\_\_\_

School Name:

(Tally grades taught)

Village/Town/City:

Region:

Type of school: Regular elementary / Multigrade / Intercultural Bilingual Program

Objective: To learn about their experience in teaching reading, their use of materials and assessment, and their views on the needs of their students.

Thank you for giving time for this interview. We are consultants for USAID who are on a fact-finding mission to explore the possible need for an after school program in literacy (*lectoescritura*) to help underperforming primary grade students in the Atlantic Region. All responses are confidential, and will be used to help us make appropriate recommendations.

1. Tell us a bit about your background(s). Where did you study to become a teacher? How long have you been teaching? What grades do you teach?
2. What language do your students speak at home? At school?
3. Please describe the reading program in your classroom. (What methods and materials do you use to teach reading in your school? In what way could they be improved?)
4. Do you have children in your class that are not reading, or that need help with reading? (How many?) What do you think are the reasons these children have problems? What would help you meet their needs?
5. How do you keep track of student progress in reading and writing?
6. Are there already after-school programs offered in this neighborhood (or district or town)? Please describe them. (Are they successful? Why or why not?)
7. If you were going to design an after-school program in literacy for underperforming students, what kind of activities would you include? What other recommendations would you make for the design of such a program?



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8. In what languages do you think such a program should be offered?
  9. Do you think the children would come to an after-school program? What factors might keep them from coming? What incentives might encourage them to come? (games, a meal?)
  10. Do you think parents would be supportive of such a program? (If no: What could be done to interest them? If yes: Do you think they would be interested in helping?)
  11. Would you be interested in being a teacher or facilitator in such a program? Why or why not? What training do you think you would need to prepare you to work in such a program? (What would be helpful in encouraging your participation?)
  12. We've heard about SEAR. Could you please outline to us its role and functions? Please describe its effect on your work.
  13. Would you like to tell us anything that we have not asked you?
  14. Do you have any questions for us?



## INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Interviewers:

Date:

Number of Parents in group: M\_\_\_\_F\_\_\_\_

(Tally grades their children attend)

School Name:

Village/Town/City:

Region:

Type of school: Regular elementary / Multigrade / Intercultural Bilingual Program

Objective: Get their perception on their children's school experience and what the children need.

Thank you for giving time for this interview. We are consultants who are on a fact-finding mission to make suggestions for an after school program in literacy (*lectoescritura*) to help 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in the Atlantic Region. All responses are confidential, and will help us know what to recommend.

1. Tell us about your children: What grades are they in?
2. What language do your children speak at home? At school?
3. How are your children doing in reading and writing?
4. Do you know if there any after school programs to encourage children to read? Would you be interested in having your children attend such a program at your school?
5. Are there other things you would like your children to learn or do in an after school program?
6. In what languages do you think such a program should be offered?
7. If your children were having difficulties in reading, would you send them to such a program?
8. Do you think the children would like to come to an after-school program? What might keep them from coming? What would encourage them to come?
9. Are there other types of after-school programs offered in this neighborhood (or district or town)? Please describe them.

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10. Would you be interested in participating in an after-school reading program? Why or why not? What training do you think you would need to prepare you to work in such a program?
  11. Are you familiar with the work of SEAR? What impact has it made, in your experience?
  12. Would you like to tell us anything that we have not asked you?
  13. Do you have any questions for us?



## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### FOR NORMAL SCHOOL STUDENTS

Interviewers:

Date:

No. of Students in Group:

M\_\_F\_\_

(Tally no. of yrs. of Normal school)

Name of Normal School

Village/Town/City:

Objective: Learn what they have learned about reading (*lectoescritura*) instructions, assess their interest in assisting in an after school program, and obtain their suggestions for activities.

Thank you for giving time for this interview. We are consultants for USAID who are on a fact-finding mission to explore the possible need for an after school program in literacy (*lectoescritura*) to help underperforming primary grade students in the Atlantic Region. All responses are confidential, and will be used to help us make appropriate recommendations.

1. What have you learned about teaching reading?
2. Do you feel prepared to teach it? (In what languages?) If not, what other training do you feel that you need?
3. Have you had any practical experience in a classroom? Please describe.
4. Do you think there is a need for an after-school program for children having difficulty learning to read?
5. Do you have any suggestions for activities for an after-school program in *lectoescritura*?
6. Would you be interested in helping in such a program?
7. Are you familiar with the work of SEAR? What impact has it made, in your experience?
14. Would you like to tell us anything that we have not asked you?
15. Do you have any questions for us?



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## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### FOR DONORS

Interviewers:

Date;

Donor Organization:

Name of Person(s) interviewed:

Position:

City/Town/Region:

Objective: To determine which donors are active in the areas of reading, crime prevention, and the Atlantic Coast; to gain any lessons learned from those investments; and to explore the complementarities in program implementation.

Thank you for giving time for this interview. We are consultants for USAID who are on a fact-finding mission to explore the possible need for an after school program in literacy for primary grade students on the Atlantic Coast. We'd like to learn about your programs and explore any possible complementarities.

1. Please outline the focus of your investments in Nicaragua.
2. Do you have any programs focused on reading, at-risk youth, after-school programs, crime prevention, and/or the Atlantic Coast? If yes, please describe those projects and their results. Are any of them implemented by NGOs? (Do you have any experience working with NGOs in the area of reading?)
3. Can you provide us with information about educational programs and problems in the Mining Triangle, specifically with regard to the needs of indigenous children? Do you know of individuals or organizations who can provide us with such information?
4. Considering any one of these areas, what were the lessons learned from those investments?
5. Do you have any plans to work in these areas (reading, at-risk youth, after-school programs, crime prevention, and/or the Atlantic coast) in the next five years? If yes, please describe.
6. Do you know of other donors or NGOs that might be interested in these areas?
7. Are you working with the MINED at National, Regional or local levels currently and, if yes, what has been that experience?

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8. Given your experience working in Nicaragua, can you provide us with any helpful hints about implementation in any of the areas that we have been discussing?
  9. (For those working on the Atlantic coast) We've heard about SEAR. Could you please outline to us its role and functions? Please describe its impact on education on the Atlantic coast.
  10. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us that is relevant to our investigation?
  11. Do you have any questions for us?



## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### FOR NGOs/PVOs

Interviewers:

Date:

Name of Organization:

Name of person(s) interviewed:

Position(s):

Village, town, city:

Region:

Objective of Interview: To determine past experience and lessons learned from NGO/PVO implementers in the areas of reading, at-risk youth, after-school programs, crime prevention, and/or the Atlantic Coast and to assess suitability of the NGO/PVO as a possible implementation partner.

Thank you for giving time for this interview. We are consultants for USAID who are on a fact-finding mission to explore the possible need for an after school program in literacy (*lectoescritura*) to help underperforming primary grade students in the Atlantic Region. We'd like to learn about your programs and explore any possible opportunities for collaboration.

1. Please describe the focus of your program(s) in Nicaragua.
2. What experience does your organization have in working in the areas of reading, at-risk youth, after-school programs, crime prevention, and/or the Atlantic Coast? If yes, please describe these. Do you have data available or samples of materials in Spanish, Creole, Miskito, Mayangna or Rama?)
3. Can you please comment on the differing situations and needs of students in the RAAS and the RAAN, and especially in the mining triangle?
4. What are the lessons you have learned from those experiences?
5. In your view, what are some of the major issues to be addressed in the areas of reading, at-risk youth, after-school programs, crime prevention, and/or the Atlantic coast?
6. If you have not had direct experience but you have an interest in working in the areas of reading, at-risk youth, after-school programs, crime prevention, and/or the Atlantic Coast, please describe some of the interventions you would implement.

- 
7. Please describe (or provide) a description of your organization's capacity to carry out programs in these areas. (Who are your sponsors? Do you have an NGO capability statement? Please describe any grants you've received.)
  8. Given your experience working in Nicaragua, are there any helpful hints about implementation in any of the areas that we have been discussing that you would like to point out?
  9. (For those working on the Atlantic coast) We've heard about SEAR. Could you please outline to us its role and functions? Please describe its impact on education on the Atlantic coast.
  10. Is there anything else you would like to tell us that is relevant to our investigation?
  11. Do you have any questions for us?